



**TESOL practitioner identities in the United Arab Emirates:  
Discourses of neoliberalism**

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## Abstract

In the era of neoliberal globalisation, higher education has taken on new significance internationally in terms of its role in creating local knowledge economies to engage with the wider ‘global economy.’ Universities across the world have responded to this commercial imperative by ‘internationalising’ their curricula, in many cases employing English language-teaching professionals – particularly those from ‘BANA’/‘Western’ countries – to facilitate this transformation. While these educators perform a central function in globalising education, little is known about their experiences as migrant professionals and very few studies have examined the professional ‘identities’ of such English language teachers. This study addresses the gap in research literature on English language teacher identities by exploring the professional lives of a group of eight ‘Western’ English teachers working at an institution of higher learning in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The study examines the experiences of these language teachers in the UAE, considering both their self-perceived roles as educators, and the ways in which they regard their students (UAE nationals) and the communities of which they are a part. The research utilises interview data verified through summary-memos sent to the interviewees. The analysis of the data reveals that the teachers struggle with their various (and often conflicting) professional identities and the conflicts between ‘internationalised’ higher education and the perceived realities of the local context. The evidence suggests that this struggle has resulted in feelings of alienation among teachers toward the institution for which they work. The analysis of interviews also reveals a perceived sense of estrangement toward students among the participants. In many cases this is expressed in their chauvinistic appraisals of ‘local culture,’ which is regarded as an obstruction to the globalising institutional ethos.

More broadly, the data shows that many of the attitudes exhibited by participants are reflective of ideologies that infuse the discourse of neoliberalism. In particular, these relate to notions of self-sufficiency, entrepreneurialism, privatisation, welfarism and the purposes of education. Assumptions linked to these attitudes have thus led the participants to evaluate their professional context and their students negatively. These assumptions are so prevalent in the discourse of the participants that they may be regarded as significant strands of their professional identities.

The study is of particular significance in that it reveals conflict between the discourses of education and those of commercialisation/globalisation and the effect that this can have on professionals working within this domain. In a broader sense, the study exposes the tensions that arise when the macrostructural forces of globalisation intersect with local realities and the effects that this intersection can have upon social actors in these local contexts.

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## List of acronyms

BANA	Britain, Australia, North America
BEd	Bachelor of Education degree
CELTA	Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
CoP	Community of Practice
DELTA	Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
ELT	English Language Teaching/Teacher(s)
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MA	Master of Arts Degree
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UAE	United Arab Emirates



## Chapter 1: Introduction

The beliefs and attitudes of teachers have a profound effect on the process of education (Wright, 1987) just as the educational institutions in which they work are critical sites of identity formation, values refinement, and social reproduction (Monahan, 2005: 1). The individual subjectivities of educators, however, receive very little attention in mainstream research literature related to education and educational change (Carson, 2005). Not a great deal is known, in fact, about how teachers understand their careers, their identities as teachers, educational policies, and “teaching situations” (Fotheringham, 2006: i). Investigations into teacher identity in particular are fairly new to educational research and just as the study of identity itself has only recently attracted the attention of researchers (Thornbury, 2006), most of the existing research on teacher identity has been published in the past decade (Cardelle-Elawar & Lisarraga, 2010). This is also true in the area of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), where very little published research on language teacher knowledge and identity exists in any context (Troudi, 2005, Breen, 2006, Clarke & Tsui, 2007, Liu & Xu, 2011).

This study explores the subject of English language teacher (ELT) identities – specifically the professional “selves” of language teachers within the globalising profession/industry of international English language teaching. It examines the various elements that comprise the professional identities of ELTs, from broadly theoretical conceptions of macrostructural influences to the substantive local specificities of working as a language teacher in an international environment.

## 1.1 Rationale for the study

As a teacher of English to speakers of other languages – and indeed, as a ‘global citizen’ - I am interested in understanding the roles I (and others) play in the emerging international free market economic system and how the various changes accompanying economic globalisation affect aspects of my professional (and perhaps, by extension, my personal) life. I think that it is important to follow and comprehend large-scale international developments in social, economic and political life in order to better understand transformations that are occurring at the level of locality and the potential effects that extensive worldwide change can have on local social actors. I do not wish to overprivilege ‘global change’ at the expense of local ‘reality’ and I understand that the relationship between the two may be dialectical in many ways, but I do feel that macrostructural developments are potentially overwhelming in their effects and may, therefore, have a profound effect on local practises and subjectivities.

From a professional perspective, this study is motivated by my need to understand how both the profession and the business of English language teaching in institutions of higher learning are shaped by these ‘global forces’ and the various effects that this might have on language teachers internationally. Specifically, I am interested in examining the ways in which the curriculum, management structure, and intended outcomes of English language teaching (within the structure of internationalised higher education) might contribute to the construction of teacher attitudes vis-à-vis the purposes of education and their roles as educators. More fundamentally, I am concerned about the ways in which prevailing notions regarding corporate governance, labour standards and even human rights affect teachers as employees and as people in international and cross-cultural contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, I would like to consider the different ways in which the ‘self’ is constructed and how people in social settings develop particular identities – specifically professional identities. I want to explore ways in which language and identity formation interact and are potentially affected by the various discourses with which contemporary globality is infused. Finally, I think it is important to reflect on how these might affect social actors in terms of the quality of their (professional) lives, and the ways in which they come to regard themselves and others.

## **1.2 Focus of the study**

The study investigates the various and multiple roles that English language teachers see themselves performing as well as the nature of the relationships they have with their students and the communities of which they are a part. I have conducted the analysis through the lens of ‘identity’ – specifically the professional identities of eight language teachers working at a public institution of higher learning in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). I consider the various ways in which the teachers regard their professional ‘selves’ and their functions as teachers, educators, employees, and professionals. This includes discussions of the purpose of education and English language teaching, the roles of teachers within that, the advantages and disadvantages of teaching in international contexts, and challenges of the professional work environment. I also examine the attitudes that teachers take toward ‘Others;’ in particular, their students and the communities and cultural backgrounds from which they come. Here I examine the roles that English language teachers have assumed vis-à-vis the United Arab Emirates, the perceived need for English language instruction among the student and local populations, general views on the ‘culture’ of the students, and potential outcomes (educational and otherwise) for local English language learners.

### 1.3 Conceptual framework

This research study examines the experiences of TESOL practitioners working in a UAE higher education context and considers ways in which their professional identities have been insinuated by neoliberalised economies of education and professionalism. In order to get a sense of TESOL professional identities as they are conceived in this study, it is useful first to define identity, neoliberalism, and TESOL professionalism, as I will do below. Following this, I will outline the concept of TESOL professional identity that I will explore in more detail in chapter three.

The concept of identity is central to this study particularly in terms of its use to seek understanding of the attitudes expressed by the participants regarding their roles as language teachers. Defining identity, however, is not a straightforward undertaking as the term has multiple meanings and the theories surrounding it are often nebulous and contradictory (and will likely remain so, in my opinion). The term ‘identity,’ for the purposes of this study, will describe people’s appreciation of their connections to the world (Fleming, 2003) and the various ways in which they understand themselves and others (Trent, 2010: 1). Identity ‘formation’ is regarded here as both discursive and practical (Joseph and Heading, 2010), and “semiotic behaviour” - as free-willed activity that expresses subjectivities (and subject positions) - is framed as “linguistic enactments of discourses” that infuse individual identities (Block, 2007: 17). Additionally, I understand identity as being political in nature and connected to “power relations in particular sites of practice” (Fotheringham, 2006: i) as well as a project of individual agency. In this study, ‘power’ will be conceptualised as involving global capitalism and the discourse of neoliberalism that sustains its gradual appropriation of social life.

The term neoliberalism will refer to the philosophy of the ‘free’ market, according to which trade is ideally ‘liberalised’ (deregulated) and government intervention in commercial activity is minimised. I see it as an “ideological project” (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2010: 11), which has provided both moral and political justification for the free market reorientation and financialisation of many societies in recent decades (Holborow, 2012). I also present it as a kind of “public pedagogy” (Giroux, 2004: xxv), which is “hegemonic” (Reiner, 2007: 1-2) as it characterises “common sense” in many international contexts (Connell, 2010: 22). “Neoliberalisation,” for the purposes of this study, is considered a prominent strand of identity for people living in neoliberal societies, whose collective values have been incrementally commercialised in recent decades (Willis, Smith, & Stenning, 2008: 3).

TESOL professionalism is understood as involving both discourses of education and those of commercialism in a teaching profession that is also – in many ways - an industry (Neilsen, 2009). I see this as the attempted combination of commercially founded, “sponsored professionalism” (devised and imposed by governing “regulatory bodies”) and “independent professionalism” (based upon teachers’ own experience and training) (Leung, 2009: 49, 50). The probable divergence between these ‘dual professionalisms’ is connected here with an “erosion of autonomy” for teachers, whose sense of independent professionalism may be eclipsed by institutionally enforced, market-driven concepts of professionalism and ‘best practice’ (Day, 1999: 6). This “irresolvable” discrepancy is also presented as a primary strand of professional identity for TESOL practitioners, who experience varying degrees of tension between official standards of ideal performance and independent professional expertise (Stronach et al., 2002: 122, 130).

In simple terms then, I understand the professional identities of TESOL practitioners as being shaped by both the local contexts in which they practise and by the broader social, cultural, economic and political worlds that they inhabit (Breen 2007, Trent, 2012). To elaborate, ESOL teachers identify with locally practising communities of educators within local institutions that are part of local societies (Clarke, 2008, Scollon & Scollon, 2001). These influences, however, interact with – and are themselves influenced by – broad macrostructural changes, particularly those relating to globalisation and its various socio-political manifestations (Crichton, 2010, Thornbury, 2010). In fact, the enormity of globalisation and the neoliberal philosophies that sustain the process are of particular significance in terms of their potential to direct TESOL professional identification (Chun, 2009).

This process interacts with the proliferation of English as both international lingua franca and medium of instruction in internationalised higher education (Singh & Doherty, 2004). It also perpetuates the industrial aspects of TESOL, which align with the commercial imperatives of globalisation and can potentially reconfigure TESOL professionalism as technical and customer-service oriented (Nielsen, 2009). Both of these considerations have key socio-political implications, which can be regarded as dynamics in the construction of TESOL professional identities (Phillipson, 2009).

#### **1.4 Aims, objectives, and research questions**

Broadly, this study adds to the existing body of research on language teacher identities and initiates enquiry into foreign English language teacher identities in the United Arab Emirates. My research objectives included exploring the professional lives of TESOL professionals in the UAE and intensifying the discussion surrounding globalisation and English language

teaching in higher education. Specifically I consider the possible effects of international educational change on the identity formation of the participants expressed in terms of their roles both as educators and as temporary residents in the United Arab Emirates. I also connect the experiences of the participants to broader societal contexts internationally in order to present them as social actors in the global economy.

Personally, I conducted this study in order to understand changes that are occurring in education, why they are occurring, and the effects of these transformations on English language teachers – and perhaps educators in general – in higher education. I am sharing what I have learned with colleagues locally and internationally in the hope that what I have discovered will add to the existing literature on teacher identification as it relates to both macrostructural and micro-contextual issues that English language teachers – and indeed, all educators - currently face.

In order to meet these objectives, I addressed the following research questions in conducting the study:

1. How do English faculty members working at an institution of higher learning in the United Arab Emirates define themselves as teachers?

*and*

2. How do they perceive their roles in the society of the United Arab Emirates?

## **1.5 Significance of the study**

The UAE and other member nations of the Gulf Cooperation Community (GCC) are of “immense geopolitical significance” but are also “under-researched” in many areas of public life, including education (Clarke, 2008, Shaw, 1997). There has been only limited investigation into various aspects of education in the Arabian Gulf region, including staffing, funding, curriculum, infrastructure, and assessing the role of education in the

knowledge economy and its expanding global workforce (Nicks-McCaleb, 2005).

There is also a “paucity of research” on English language teacher identities in general, with fewer than a dozen published studies available on the subject (Liu & Xu, 2011: 590). As well, there are no published research studies into teacher identity among in-service English language teachers in UAE higher education. This study examines ways in which aspects of local English language teacher identities resonate with larger-scale educational change and elements of teacher identities identified in other contexts. It illustrates ways in which the experiences of the participants reflect changes that are occurring in educational contexts worldwide – partly as consequences of economic globalisation. It also considers the role of neoliberalism as providing ideological justification for these changes and ways in which these ideologies may become naturalised in the discourses of education and professionalism. Specifically, it reveals ways in which discourses of neoliberalism can be taken up by English language teachers who may not stand to benefit from the implementation of neoliberal technologies.

The study demonstrates how aspects of the institutional culture of the research setting – including the curriculum and management structure - are very similar to those found in other professional/educational contexts internationally. It also explores ways in which the participants understand themselves (and their roles) as educators and how these understandings reflect changes associated with the internationalisation of higher education and economic globalisation.

I argue that elements of the local institutional ethos have affected the ways in which TESOL practitioners regard their work, their students, and the communities in which they live. There is evidence to suggest that this institutional climate has directed teachers’ levels of professional satisfaction



and their desire to engage with local cultural and professional perspectives; issues related to curricula and recommended institutional learning outcomes in particular have had a strong impact upon relationships between teachers and their students. More broadly, the interview data reveal that the participants' experiences in the research context have influenced the degree to which they feel committed to their employer and even to TESOL as a profession. Overall, there are indications that the teachers who participated in this study have taken particular views regarding the political significance of their work that may affect their professional identities beyond the limits of the research context.

The study illustrates ways in which elements of global ELT within internationalised higher education interact with local realities and the potential effects that this can have on the lives and professional identities of English language teachers. I hope that this will help teachers and researchers to understand the connections between macrostructural forces and local consequences and encourage them to explore new possibilities in education, not only in employment terms for educators, but also in educational outcomes, curriculum design and institutional governance. The study is of particular significance to TESOL practitioners working in higher education internationally, though aspects of it will resonate with educators – and perhaps other transnationally practising professionals – in a variety of contexts beyond English language teaching. It is also significant for managers and teacher educators – particularly those involved in TESOL at the post-secondary level – as it examines the effects of interactions between institutional management and pedagogy and explores new directions for teacher education in TESOL.

## 1.6 Organisation of the thesis

Following the introduction, I describe the research context in chapter two and demonstrate the need for further research in the area of language teacher identity in UAE higher education. In chapter three, I review the literature on teacher identity and educational change, elaborating on the theoretical and substantive elements of identity that I outlined in my conceptual framework. In the fourth chapter, I discuss the methodological underpinnings of the study and the various methods of data collection and analysis within the research design. I also summarise ethical considerations here and explain how the identities of the participants can be explored while maintaining their anonymity as research subjects. In chapter five, I present the findings of the study according to the themes and issues raised in the literature review. I examine the themes of conflict, separation, alienation, commercialisation, and detachment, for example, as elements of local ELT professional identity. Finally, in chapter six I discuss and interpret the findings, again relating the data to issues raised in the background and literature review. I discuss attitudes taken up by the participants in the study relating to professionalism, politics, and society and the implications of these attitudes. I reflect on participant views as they connect to issues of commercialisation in TESOL, higher education and society and the neoliberal philosophies that undergird these processes. Finally, I consider the effects of the institutional outlook on the professional identities of the participants and their various means of coping with the pressures they experience in the workplace.

## Chapter 2: The research setting

### Introduction

In the Persian Gulf region, particularly in GCC member states, there is a “revolution” taking place in education (Bashshur, 2010: 247). State-funded higher education in particular is a rapidly developing economic sector in which the intersection of ‘globality’ and ‘locality’ is highly significant (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). Leading the region in education reform, the United Arab Emirates has created the “most globalised” system of higher education in the world (Smith, 2008: 21) to prepare UAE national students for participation in the global knowledge economy.

This research study is concerned with the professional identities of a group of educators working as English language teachers at an institution of higher learning in the United Arab Emirates. The main purpose of this chapter is to describe the social, political, and professional environments in which these English language teachers practise and thereby illuminate features of the research context that are salient to their professional lives. Understanding the context in which the research was conducted will also help to interpret the research data and recognise themes that arise in participant accounts of that context. My aim is to provide a sense of the various economic and political undercurrents that comprise the present social order in the country, considering both their bearing on UAE higher education and their interface with the process of neoliberal globalisation. More specifically, I would like to highlight the different - and sometimes conflicting - local, national, and international social dynamics that intersect at local institutions of higher learning to illustrate their interaction with (and complication of) TESOL professional identities.

In order to do this, I will first provide a brief overview of UAE society, considering in particular social stratification in the UAE, the social contract, the petroleum industry, ‘Emiratisation,’ and the problem of unemployment as issues that involve local higher education. Following this, I will examine the effects of globalisation in the UAE, focusing on the expatriate workforce in the country and various aspects of their experience. I will also present Western TESOL practitioners in the UAE as members of this massive multinational “imported” labour force that comprises over 80% of the UAE’s total workforce (Fernandes, 2011: 2) and close to 90% of its total population (UAE Interact, 2012: 4). Finally, I will explore the role of local higher education, considering its purposes, perceived shortcomings, the role of English language teaching and teachers within it, and characterisations of local students at UAE institutions of higher learning. All of these aspects of the research setting will help to establish a context through which to better understand the experiences of the participants in this study and interpret their accounts of professional practise in their UAE context.

## **2.1 The United Arab Emirates – a brief overview**

When contemplating UAE higher education and the experience of locally practising English language teachers, it is useful to first consider the social and political contexts in which national HEIs operate. Understanding something of Emirati society permits an appreciation of the social contract in the UAE and ways in which this intersects with public higher education. Below, I will explore some areas of UAE society with a view to describing the research context and establishing the broader local circumstances of this study. I will briefly consider the short history of the country, the current socio-political situation, and unemployment as a consequence of local political structures. This will provide a backdrop against which to

contextualise the experiences of English language teachers in local higher education and understand the themes that arise in their accounts of TESOL practise in a UAE institution of higher learning.

### **2.1.1 UAE society**

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of small territories located on the northeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula. These were amalgamated in 1971 to form an independent nation governed by the largest of the Emirates: Abu Dhabi. Prior to confederation, the Emirates had been known as the “Trucial States” and had functioned independently of one another as protectorates of the British who, in exchange for unrestricted use of local waterways (The Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf), protected the Trucial States from “Ottoman expansion” and from one another; the British government helped to resolve disputes between local rulers when they arose (Ferguson, 2003: 316, Hourani, 1991).

When independence from Britain was declared in 1971, all non-British residents within the UAE’s new borders were granted UAE citizenship. The ethnic make-up of UAE nationals then, is varied (as there were many ethno-cultural groups represented among UAE residents at the time of confederation) and it is not possible to describe an Emirati in terms of ethnicity (Walsh, 2008). In fact, women from neighboring countries are often “imported” as wives for Emirati men (who are polygamous in some cases) and are granted UAE citizenship (Walsh, 2008: 17).

Generally, one can expect that a UAE national will speak Arabic (the official language of the UAE) and practise Islam, around which many of the country’s social and political institutions are organised. While it is important to avoid essentialised and “potentially reductive” notions of “UAE culture” (Clarke, 2008: 21), cultural continuities such as Islamic beliefs, the Arabic language, architecture, art, dress, music, food, and specific customs do exist

(Kazim, 2000: 452) and may comprise one type of ‘identity’ for UAE nationals.

### 2.1.2 Contemporary sociopolitical issues in the UAE

Since unification, the UAE has undergone rapid transformation that has followed the expansion of the petroleum industry; the country has proven oil reserves of approximately 100 billion barrels - enough to last for roughly a century at present rates of production (Gonzalez et al., 2008). With a current local population of roughly one million people (Chilton, 2011: 2), there is a great deal of state-owned wealth to be distributed among this relatively small population; Emiratis have been described as “affluent” and the “biggest spenders in the Arab world” (Nydell, 2006: 188). The United Nations and the World Bank, however, classify the UAE as a “developing country” (albeit one with a relatively high GDP) (Godwin, 2006: 5) and by some measures (which I will set out below) it is also a “third world” country (Heard-Bey, 2004: 3).

The United Arab Emirates support a political system of “feudal modernity” (Godwin, 2006: 5), with a local monarchy that has been described as a “relic of British imperialism” (Henry & Springborg, 2001: 168). Prior to 1971, particular local rulers had assumed power with the help of the British administration, who oversaw aspects of life in the Persian Gulf region “according to their convenience” (Margonelli, 2007: 219). While this helped to centralise political leadership in the UAE, it also alienated members of other prominent (politically influential) Emirati families who had not been included in the process of political restructuring administered by the British and felt that they also had legitimate claims to official positions of power in the newly-formed UAE. As with other regimes in the Middle East then, the present UAE government suffers from a “deficit of legitimacy” (Henry & Springborg, 2001: 11).

This concern has motivated the non-democratic government of the UAE to form a patronage-based welfare state to shore up the current regime and avoid the accountability issues that would likely accompany taxation (Henry & Springborg, 2001: 11). Local pressure for governmental reform is circumvented or reduced by drawing on “legitimacy resources” such as “wealth allocation” from the ruling families of the Emirates to their constituents/subjects (Davidson, 2009: 128). This includes discounted or free housing, complimentary government services (such as education and health care), sizable monetary grants, tax-free incomes, well-paid public sector jobs and general advantages in business and employment for Emiratis (Davidson, 2009). All of these measures comprise an “unwritten bargain” between the UAE government and its subjects, who accept “persistently invasive media censorship” and a “worrying” national record of human rights violations along with exclusion from self-government in exchange for wealth allocation and other privileges (Clarke, 2008; Davidson, 2009: 2,3).

### 2.1.3 Unemployment in the UAE

The generosity of federal and local governments, however, has had unintended consequences in the UAE; approximately 14% of Emiratis are unemployed and 30% of younger UAE nationals (below age 25) are also jobless (Doran, 2012). Emiratis tend to work primarily in the public sector – 90% of employed Emiratis hold government jobs (Doran, 2012) - as civil servants, which has created a “broad upper class of nationals” without a national working class (Gonzalez et al., 2008: 25). Almost 40% of Emiratis were under the age of 15 as of 2008, however, which means that even with its enormous oil reserves, it may be difficult for the UAE to sustain this demographic profile in the future as its young adult population rises (Gonzalez et al., 2008).

To help contain this potential crisis, the UAE government has introduced a policy of “Emiratisation,” or governmental “retrogression” in favour of the private sector (Lootah, 2006: 245), to help nationalise the workforce, reduce unemployment rates, and generally help UAE nationals to become more self-sufficient. The policy also operates as a type of affirmative action program, where hiring quotas are imposed on local private sector employers (in most cases, private organisations in the UAE are foreign – often transnational corporations – with a largely foreign client base), who are required to employ UAE nationals as a percentage of their staff (Godwin, 2006). Emiratisation, however, has not been very successful in the private sector, particularly in areas such as finance and insurance (Godwin, 2006), and unemployment is likely to remain high in the UAE (Doran, 2012).

According to Davidson (2005), this is symptomatic of various “pathologies” that have evolved in the UAE, such as the “persistent consumerist mentality of the rentier population,” dependence on generous state patronage, and the existing social contract, which make it difficult to enact economic or political reform (175). These have resulted in a quandary for the United Arab Emirates (which may eventually be resolved by economic necessity) where public sector employment continues to present a more attractive option to young UAE nationals than does involvement in the local private sector (Davidson, 2009). These ‘pathologies’ are also of direct significance to UAE higher education, which ostensibly promotes knowledge and skills development requisite to successful participation in local private sectors. They are also significant to this research study in that they help to interpret collected interview data pertaining to informants’ perceptions of UAE society, its interface with local higher education, and the conflicts that can arise between teachers and students whose interests



and motivations appear to diverge in various ways (discussed under the theme heading of interpersonal conflict – see chapter 5).

## **2.2 Globalisation and the United Arab Emirates**

As this study addresses neoliberal globalisation and its interaction with ELT professional identities, it considers ways in which globalisation also interconnects with higher education in the UAE. For the purposes of this research, it is helpful to understand the connection between the growth of international markets and the expansion of UAE tertiary education. It is also useful to contextualise the presence of foreign English language teachers in local higher education in the larger endeavour of ‘globalising’ the nation. Below, I will outline the importance of globalisation to the UAE economy and the influx of foreign professionals as a consequence of economic development in the UAE. I will also describe the expatriate workforce with a view to establishing the image of English language teachers in local universities as temporary foreign guest workers who have little connection to the domestic society of the United Arab Emirates.

### **2.2.1 Economic development in the UAE**

Member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are “feeling the wind of globalisation” (Al-Sulayti, 1999: 271), and the UAE has become the most globalised of the GCC states (Lootah, 2006); it has experienced significant economic growth in recent years due to liberal trade regulations and an “open business environment” linked to a stable government structure (Godwin, 2006: 3). The Prime Minister of the UAE, Mohamed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, says that he would like to see the UAE become the “most successful country in the world” (Ross, 2008: 267) and has overseen the transformation of the country from a “sleepy backwater” to a “dazzling

tourist Mecca” through a program of “lightning paced development” (Ross, 2008: 260) likened to a “cyclone of modernisation” (Ross, 2008: 270, 271).

The UAE is the core site for business in the Middle East and is a regional centre for a number of transnational corporations (Al-Jassim, 1997). Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE and the hub of regional oil production, is said to be the world’s wealthiest city (Tatchell, 2009) and it has been projected that the city of Dubai, already the “premier trading entrepot of the Persian Gulf” (Davidson, 2008:1), will grow into a “regional financial centre on par with New York and London” (Nydell, 2006: 187).

These developments may help to diversify the UAE’s local economy, and could also aid in establishing a viable post-oil financial system based on trade and tourism as opposed to petroleum. Globalisation may also put pressure on the UAE government to enact more progressive human rights legislation (Davidson, 2005) and possibly implement democratic reforms to its present organisation (Zia, 2006), though the changes that accompany internationalisation will likely be overseen by the Emirati elite and may not benefit all Emiratis equally. The UAE, however, is still considered “deficient” in areas of industry, technology and knowledge (Lootah, 2006: 245). As these areas of expertise are thought to be requisite to successful participation in the ‘free market,’ the UAE will probably continue to experience challenges as it opens to the globalising world economy (Lootah, 2006).

### **2.2.2 The expatriate workforce in the UAE**

The process of globalising the United Arab Emirates has resulted in major demographic change over a relatively short period. In 1968, there were twice as many ‘locals’ as there were foreigners in what was to become the UAE (Heard-Bay, 2004). By 2004, however, only 1 in 5 residents were Emiratis (Heard-Bey, 2004: xxxiii). As of 2012, the population of the UAE

was roughly 7 million people (UAE Interact, 2012) less than 20% of whom were citizens of the UAE (Nydell, 2006). By the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 60% of public sector jobs were held by foreign expatriates and overall, 90% of the UAE's workforce was foreign (Davidson, 2005: 147). This imbalance is a direct result of the aforementioned industrial, technological and intellectual "deficiencies" in the local workforce. The teachers who participated in this study were part of this expatriate workforce and had been hired to assist in the economic 'globalisation' of the UAE through the 'internationalisation' of local higher education. Specifically, they were contracted to help prepare young Emiratis for entry into the UAE's growing private sector workforce – where communicating in English is essential - by developing their English language skills.

Generally speaking, however, the national population remains "as distinct as possible" from the foreign expatriate population (Davidson, 2009: 131). Naturalisation is practically impossible for foreigners in the UAE and the "Emirati identity" is "fiercely preserved" (Davidson, 2009: 131). This helps to ensure that national wealth will remain in the hands of Emiratis and will not be diluted by an influx of foreign expatriates (Davidson, 2009). UAE nationals in the labour force, in fact, have created a national identity that juxtaposes them with "immigrant workers" (Kazim, 2000: 409). It is unlikely then, that a foreign visitor to the UAE will integrate with, or feel a part of, "Emirati society" or even appreciate its numerous subtleties (Walsh, 2008: 45). For Emiratis, the likelihood of establishing "genuine" relationships or "true friendship" with outsiders is scant (Walsh, 2008: 45, 81). In many cases, however, foreign professionals are attracted by the tax-free salaries and improved standards of living available to them in the UAE – not through any desire to integrate with local society (Davidson, 2009).

According to Davidson (2005), expatriate professionals (“advisors and technicians” in particular) are politically influential in the UAE, as they are instrumental to the modernisation of the country (Davidson, 2005: 147). According to Gonzalez (et al. 2008), however, the UAE government views foreign workers in general as potential threats to security who have no genuine vested interest in the development of the country and no allegiance to it. It is perhaps ironic then, that the UAE government offers only short-term residence permits to expatriate workers with no possibility of permanent residence or citizenship in the future (thus perpetuating this state of affairs) (Gonzalez et al., 2008).

This may be one reason why expatriate groups in the UAE tend to be disengaged and apathetic in terms of their involvement with indigenous communities in the UAE (Davidson, 2009). Davidson (2006) describes this separation in terms of the motivations behind the apathy of foreign workers in the UAE:

...given their cautious acceptance of their employers’ sponsorship and their strictly temporary view of life in the Gulf, which is often regarded as a steppingstone to other countries and as a quick means of making money, the majority of the UAE’s resident expatriates are extremely weak civil society actors lacking any strong cultural and institutional ties with the constituencies they serve or claim to represent (Davidson, 2006: 269).

Although expatriate workers are effectively barred from seeking long-term residence in the UAE then, they also seem to avoid forming ties with the local communities of which they are, however peripherally, a part. It is possible that misconceptions regarding culture and exclusivity have enabled this dialectic and reified the notion of ‘difference’ that seems to divide the ‘foreign’ and the ‘local’ in the UAE. This rift between the local and the foreign is a conspicuous element of the UAE ethos that ties into the notion

of expatriate alienation from local society – another useful theme through which to consider the research data used in this study (see chapter 5).

## **2.3 Higher education in the United Arab Emirates**

As members of the expatriate workforce in the UAE, English language teachers are tasked not only with language teaching, but also with preparing students for participation in the emerging local/global private sector. In order to understand the experience of TESOL practitioners in local higher education, it is useful to first consider some of the philosophies that underpin the implementation of tertiary education - particularly in connection with its perceived utility to socio-economic affairs in the UAE. It is also helpful to consider the place of English language medium instruction and the need for English language teachers within the HE industry. Below, I will give a brief overview of higher education in the UAE, including the importance of English language learning, working conditions for teachers, and some perceived deficiencies in local tertiary education. I will also discuss an issue that is of central importance to this study: attitudes taken up by some teachers toward students in public higher education, the vast majority of whom are UAE nationals.

### **2.3.1 History of UAE higher education**

The provision of higher education in the UAE has expanded rapidly since its establishment in the late 1970s; there are now several state-funded universities in the UAE, as well as a large system of higher colleges of technology also operated by the federal government (in addition to a number of private colleges and universities). Public tertiary-level education is provided free to UAE nationals and they are encouraged to take advantage of it with a view to preparing themselves for the “rapidly changing job market” in the UAE (Fox & Wagie, 2006, Nydell, 2006).

Tertiary-level education may also come to function as a form of social and political capital, providing both an avenue to status and power and a means by which the ruling elite can control the emerging middle and professional classes in the UAE (Mazawi, 2008: 59-60). The explicit goals set by the UAE ministry of education, however, include “assuring quality” in local HEIs through international licensing and accreditation, enabling university/college alumnae to prepare for private sector employment, and enrolling every Emirati high school graduate in “quality” post-secondary education programs (Wagie & Fox, 2005/2006: 281, UAE government, 2011).

### 2.3.2 ‘Purposes’ of UAE higher education

Conventional wisdom in the UAE seems to hold that education should be “relevant to practical life” (Al-Jassim, 1997: 141), with learning and ‘training’ as “two faces of one coin” (Al-Sulayti, 1999: 276) and preparation for the professional world as its primary objective (Swan, 2010). This is, in part, an effect of Emiratisation; according to Godwin (2006), the system of higher education in the UAE needs to meet the demands of the business sector by providing “suitable” training and education for Emirati students (12) and developing “links” between HE and private business with a view to meeting the economic requirements of the country (Godwin, 2006:12).

Since commercial activity in the private sector involves foreign/transnational businesses serving a largely non-local client base, local educational objectives have been aligned to the requirements of foreign businesses. Like other countries in the region, the UAE prioritises the attraction of foreign capital, and needs to demonstrate that local qualifications are of an international standard and the local workforce is skilled – able to service the needs of potential foreign investors (and accept

their authority) (Davidson, 2009). These prospective stakeholders will likely want to see evidence of high standards in local education (indicating a “well educated” local population) as a prerequisite to investing in the country (Chakroun & Sicilia, 2010).

In many cases then, HEIs are primarily concerned with the provision of vocationally related proficiencies such as English language communication, management, information technology, paramedical services and media studies (Gibbs, 2010). Thus UAE higher education has been established to satisfy labour market requirements and offer “quality programs” (that are recognised by international higher education accrediting agencies) as they will provide qualified graduates who are able to function competently in the new ‘knowledge economy’ of the globalised United Arab Emirates (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010: 22, Gonzalez et al., 2008). As in numerous contexts internationally, higher education in the UAE is predominantly commercial in orientation and TESOL practise within the sector is similarly marketised. In fact, the commercialisation of educational discourse is of sufficient prominence in the research context for it to be considered another principal theme through which to interpret the research data collected during the study (see chapter 5).

### **2.3.3 English as a medium of instruction**

English has become a lingua franca in numerous higher education contexts worldwide, and the language of instruction at many universities in countries whose first languages are not English (Dedoussis, 2007). In almost all cases, instruction at post secondary educational institutions in the UAE is also conducted in English (Troudi, 2009). In fact, all new initiatives within the UAE system of higher education are dominated by considerations of the English language and English language teaching (Smith, 2008) and English has become the language of science and academia

as well as a de facto second language in the UAE (Troudi, 2009). The motivation for adopting English as the language of instruction in tertiary education originates in the popularly held belief (in the UAE as elsewhere) that speaking English is inextricably intertwined with modernity and economic growth (Xhori, 2002: 1) and therefore requisite to UAE membership in the international “knowledge economy” (Nicks-McCaleb, 2005: 322).

A significant percentage – one third of the teaching budgets of all federal universities (Lewis & Bardsley, 2010) - of the resources available to UAE institutions of higher learning then, goes toward English language instruction, which often occurs at relatively basic levels as approximately 95% of university entrants need remedial English instruction in ‘foundation’ programs before they can be admitted to degree programs (Ahmed, 2012). All of this has helped to create a “revolution” in ELT during the past decade in the United Arab Emirates (Owais, 2008: 29) as curricula are reconfigured to better service the needs of the international English-speaking market economy.

Despite considerable investment in English language education however, the results in terms of tertiary students’ attained proficiency levels in English have been “disappointing” in the UAE, as in other GCC countries (Moody, 2009: 99). In 2010, for example, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (which is used to create standards for English language communicative proficiency that UAE students must meet to gain access to higher education) reported that test takers in the UAE received the lowest overall IELTS examination scores among 40 countries in which the test is commonly used (IELTS, 2010). The students who are able to successfully pass through the foundations level and gain entry to university programs often continue to struggle with the demands of the English-language curriculum, compounding the various



institutional problems (discussed below) already faced by federal universities (Swan, 2012).

The use of English in UAE institutions of higher learning facilitates and is generated by the influence and expansion of the American higher education model (Dedoussis, 2007). Just as the English language has taken over the discourse of local higher education, English has also become the predominant mode of social and commercial interaction in the UAE. This has relegated Arabic to the status of a language of theology, literature and social communication (Troudi, 2009) with the potential effects of “educationally marginalising” the language (Troudi, 2009: 200) and supplanting locally based knowledge with “global knowledge” (Mazawi, 2010) as the imperatives of the free market supersede those of individual nation states.

### **2.3.4 Perceived shortcomings of higher education**

Although higher education has developed quickly and consumed substantial resources on the part of the UAE government and Ministry of Education, there are aspects of tertiary education that are consistently identified as deficient in related public discourse. Providing free education to students with the primary aim of readying them for the workforce, for example, may not really offer them an ‘education’ in the traditional sense (Fox & Wagie, 2006). Standardisation and ‘commodification’ in local higher education may have stripped tertiary institutions of their intellectual potential (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010), and the building of an “Arab knowledge society” has generated developmental reforms – such as the employment of technically challenging English language curricula with Arabic-speaking students - which have exacerbated a “downward spiral” in public education (Mazawi, 2010: 203) and caused the UAE education sector to “fail abysmally” (Davidson, 2009: 142).

While the above assessments are pessimistic and subjective to an extent, there are also statistical indicators of potential problems in UAE higher education. As of 2008, for example, government fiscal appropriations per university or college student in the UAE were well below international standards (Fox, 2008: 112). For example, the UAE spends only about 25% of what other Arab states spend on education in relative terms (Davidson, 2009: 151) and per student financial support actually declined by over 20% between 2000 and 2009 (Davidson, 2009: 151). Despite the growing number of enrolments at colleges and universities, enrolment in UAE higher education is still relatively low per capita (Muyskin & Nour, 2006) – possibly due to the relative ease with which local high school graduates are able to enter public sector employment. In addition to being underfunded, public higher education in the UAE has been criticised for being inefficient, poorly planned, inflexible, and ‘backward’ (Muyskin & Nour, 2006).

One of the main objectives of state-funded higher education in the UAE is gaining international accreditation and thereby being recognised as a provider of quality education (Gonzalez, et al., 2007). Borrowing curricula, policies, structures and “design principles” from Western (Anglo-American) systems and institutions of higher education then, has been accepted as a viable means to reforming local HEIs and achieving excellence in learning (Chakroun & Sicilia, 2010: 63, Donn & Al Manthri, 2010: 13). Institutions of higher learning in the GCC member states in general are often associated with Western HEIs in areas such as curriculum design and required standards of student achievement (Bashshur, 2010: 270). This means that homogenised standards of (Western) practise and achievement are applied uniformly in local education systems - often without consideration of their suitability - which can create tension in contexts with markedly different cultural heritages, including the UAE (Shaw, 2006).

### 2.3.5 Working conditions for TESOL practitioners

Just as the UAE government has imported programs of higher education, it has also recruited the foreign personnel needed to administer them and ‘deliver’ curricula to students (Portnoi, Rust & Bagley, 2010). While “expatriate academics” in general have not received much attention from researchers (Richardson & McKenna, 2002: 67), there is some limited general information available on teachers in UAE higher education.

Foreign teaching staff in UAE higher education, for example, have been described as “under-qualified” (Syed, 2003: 337, Fox & Wagie, 2006) and the institutions for which they work identified as predominantly teaching institutions where little is accomplished by way of scholarly research (Fox & Wagie, 2006). The lack of time allotted for conducting research means that teaching staff are generally expected to “carry a heavy teaching load” in tertiary education, and are regulated with regard to the amount of time they must spend at their desks and in meetings with students (Shaw, 1997: 17). While the United Arab Emirates allow a “limited level of academic freedom” (Al-Suwaidi, 1997: 135), teachers at HEIs in the region tend to self-censor for fear of political censure or deportation (Wildavsky, 2010: 51). They are not often given the time or resources to conduct research and so respondents are less sympathetic to researchers; they are more guarded in their responses and less likely to be critical of the institutions for which they work (Shaw, 1997: 17). Foreign teaching staff in UAE higher education institutions may also earn relatively high salaries, however, though their motivation to teach in the region may be seen as “mercenary” in some cases (Richardson & McKenna, 2002: 71).

A significant proportion of educators employed in UAE tertiary-level educational institutions are teaching English in ‘foundations’ or degree programs. The vast majority of these are ‘native speakers’ of English from North America, the UK, and Australia (Syed, 2003). There is very little

published research available, however, that investigates their experience working in the country/region, just as there is a dearth of information on the “working lives” of TESOL teachers generally (Mullock, 2009: 4).

As with other educators in GCC higher education (and increasingly in various other international contexts), English language teachers in the UAE have limited job security, usually working under short-term contracts with no possibility of tenure. While this offers teachers flexibility and mobility, it may also discourage visiting educators from innovating or otherwise initiating positive change in local education given their limited terms of employment (Syed, 2003). In this way, they may be similar to other foreign expatriates working in the region who have little social or emotional investment in their temporary communities. As is the case with foreign educators working in the UAE in general, English language teachers may choose to work in the UAE solely for financial gain, perpetuating what Karmani (2005) describes as the “virulent, self-serving mercenary culture” of the modern international ELT industry (92).

### **2.3.6 Essentialised appraisals of UAE students**

At public institutions of higher learning in the UAE, students are almost exclusively Arabic-speaking UAE nationals who will complete their programs of study in English in most cases. Just as there is very little by way of published research on “specific traits of UAE Arabs” (Khine & Hayes, 2010: 110) however, there is also very little information available on tertiary level UAE students. While it is best to avoid reducing people to stereotypes and otherwise “essentialising” them (Holliday, 2011: 4), there is a limited body of literature available that attempts to describe students in UAE higher education and some traits that they hold in common. Much of this research seeks to establish and demonstrate ways in which UAE/Arab culture is incongruous with Western pedagogy and so effectively prevents

student success in local higher education. While this is of limited value because it presents a deterministic and limiting view of culture (Clarke & Otaky, 2006, for example), it is relevant in that it may reflect one 'Western' point of view regarding Emirati students and thus is also pertinent to this research study.

According to Syed (2003), TESOL practitioners in GCC higher education (including the UAE) generally have to deal with issues such as low student motivation (and resultant underachievement), "reliance on rote learning" as well as out-dated (officially prescribed) methodologies, unsuitable curricula, and "insufficient support systems" (337). Richardson (2004) for example, describes Emirati students (and "Arab students" in general) as passive learners who prefer "prescriptive" learning and become disengaged when their teachers encourage them to learn independently - by acting as "facilitators," for example (432). She mentions that this type of 'student-centred' learning model is promoted at the UAE institution of higher learning for which she works (and other HEIs in the country), and indicates ways in which she thinks this is inappropriate given the cultural 'limitations' of her students.

Richardson also characterises UAE culture as "collectivist" and estimates that receiving an education serves the purpose of "enhancing the family" of the student. Thus educated Emirati females for example, will likely use their acquired knowledge to teach their children and possibly to help their husbands (through securing gainful employment, presumably) (Richardson, 2004: 433). Richardson's assessment connects with the image of UAE nationals as a "tribal people" with "deep rooted family traditions" (Dahl, 2010: 53). In most cases, this supposed cultural dynamic is also presented as intertwined with a strong commitment to Islam, whose doctrines are accepted uncritically by UAE nationals in the same way that

they purportedly accept knowledge and truth as absolute and unchanging (Dahl, 2010).

According to Bacchus (2006), local ‘Muslim students’ have difficulty engaging in higher order thinking, as their primary and secondary education has only taught them rote learning and neglected critical thinking skills entirely. UAE students in particular reportedly lack critical thinking skills because they are not encouraged - or even allowed - to question established truths and must simply accept what knowledge is conveyed to them by their teachers (Richardson, 2004, Dahl, 2010). Thus educators in regional universities will have difficulty engaging learners in activities that require criticality, originality, or other forms of independent thought, as their students’ education has not prepared them for these, according to Bacchus (2006).

In the United Arab Emirates, lack of independent critical thought is one of many ‘cultural’ issues identified by Dahl (2010) as barriers to the successful implementation of “Western pedagogical theory” locally (53). The perceived ‘family orientation’ of Emirati students, for example, means that students will often miss classes and assessments due to circumstances within their families, not understanding that they will be penalised for their absences (Dahl, 2010: 53). Attending classes regularly and being punctual as well, are not “culturally ingrained” in UAE students, as the “Western concept of time management” is purportedly foreign to them (Dahl, 2010: 54). Finally, privilege and a sense of entitlement have supposedly given rise to a “lack of initiative and motivation” among Emirati students and prevented them from taking individual responsibility for their success in the context of higher education (Dahl, 2010: 55).

The assumptions regarding ‘UAE culture’ and Emirati students outlined above are mainly chauvinistic imaginings of what Holliday (2005) describes as a “culturally problematic Other” (19). These relate to

commonly held evaluations of Arabo-Islamic societies as traditional, authoritarian, and rigid, with no opportunity for citizens to engage in analysis, self-reflexivity or any other type of criticality in thinking. They may also represent “inverted images” of an “unproblematic [Western] Self” sometimes invoked by TESOL practitioners to explain unexpected student behaviors in non-Western settings (see chapter 3) (Holliday, 2005: 19, 20).

In any event, “linguistic and cultural distance” is an issue that contributes to the difficulties faced by English language teachers and their students in The Gulf TESOL context (Syed, 2003: 339), where foreign English-speaking teachers and local Arabic-speaking students sometimes struggle to comprehend one another in various ways. It is helpful to consider both these elements of ‘local culture’ and the broad macrostructural changes with which they interact when examining the attitudes that are taken up by English language teachers, toward both local higher education and local students in higher education. In fact, the issue of non-integration with local culture is of such significance in accounts of expatriate professionalism in the UAE (see above) that alienation from UAE society is one of the major themes through which this study’s interview data may be understood (see chapter 5). As well, the interpersonal conflict that can arise between Western English language teachers (and ‘Western pedagogy’) and Emirati students when the objectives and requirements of higher education collide with perceived local realities is highly significant and also useful as a theme through which to interpret the research data (see chapter 5).

## 2.4 Summary

In seeking to understand the experience of English language teachers in UAE higher education, it is helpful to take various aspects of their professional setting into account in order to get a sense of where and how

well they ‘fit’ in local society as expatriate professionals. Above, I have considered the importance of globalisation in the UAE and ways in which it interacts with indigenous customs as frameworks within which to understand higher education and the roles of English language teachers practising in local universities. In particular, I have considered the difficulty of educating citizens for private sector nationalisation in a patronage-based welfare state and the marginalised status of English language teachers in UAE higher education despite their instrumentality in the process of globalising the country.

I have contemplated aspects of UAE Western expatriate TESOL professional ‘identity’ such as the purposes of education, working conditions for teachers, and impressions of local students. The foci of the chapter have been the themes of separation between Western expats and UAE society, the commercialisation of that society and education within it, and the discrepancies that exist between society and the ‘free market’ in the UAE – often represented in interpersonal conflicts between ‘Western’ teachers and their ‘local’ students. These can now be contextualised more broadly within the framework of TESOL identities in the following chapter and ultimately employed to support the analyses of the study’s research data.



## Chapter 3: Conceptualising TESOL practitioner identities

### Introduction

This study explores understandings of teacher identity by accessing the professional ‘selves’ of a group of English language teachers in a UAE institution of higher education. The previous chapter contemplated aspects of UAE society and their effects on English language teachers in UAE higher education, including the significance of these in the interpretation of the research data. In examining TESOL practitioner identity through analyses of the interview data (see chapter 4) it is also helpful to take the influences of broader ‘macro’ (international and discursive) and ‘mezzo’ (institutional and practical) dynamics into account (Breen, 2006; Crichton, 2010). This chapter explores some of the ways in which the ‘global’ and the local interact in the research context and the potential effects of this interaction on language teacher identities. In particular, it seeks to investigate the manner in which ideologies associated with neoliberal globalisation can become components of TESOL professional identity construction at a local level.

The aim of this chapter is to construct a view of identity through which to understand the professional experience of the participants in the study and the various ways in which they envisage themselves as educators. The conceptualisations of identity outlined below take a sociocultural perspective derived from both structuralist and poststructuralist theoretical models (acknowledging, for example, the roles of both social structures and individual agency in the formation of identity). These theoretical positions are set out with the intention of utilising them to better access and understand the ‘identities’ of the participants in the study. They are also used to assist in the exploration of the findings (chapter 5) before they are further developed in the discussion (chapter 6).

In very simple terms, I see TESOL professional identity as a combination of practical, discursive and agentic ‘elements’ that comprise the selfhood of English language teachers. To elaborate, I regard TESOL professional identity as a personal appraisal of selfhood based on life history, self-awareness, and professional experience. I also believe, however, that TESOL professional identities are ‘co-constructed’ through interactions between professionals working in groups of practising language teachers (communities of practise) (Wenger, 1998). These professional communities, though, also interact with and take up discourses that originate in broader social contexts than those in which the groups are situated. Thus the identity of the TESOL professional can be perceived as discursively co-constructed through co-participation in communities of practise. For the purposes of this study, the discourses with which I am primarily concerned are those that relate to the process of neoliberal globalisation and its commercially oriented reconfigurations of international social and political life.

From a wider perspective, TESOL identity construction can be regarded as evolving from the infusion of TESOL professionalism with commercially oriented ideologies of neoliberal discourse (Crichton, 2010). These emergent forms of ‘common sense’ are taken up by practising communities of TESOL professionals and are subsumed by the discourse, practise and subsequent identity construction of individual teachers (Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Holliday, 1999; Trent, 2012; also see Table 1 for a schematic representation of this relationship). This is what Fairclough (2010) refers to as the “social formation, the social institution, and social action” as societal determinants of individual subjectivities and identities (40). This formulation is dialectically – as opposed to mechanistically – determinative, however (Fairclough, 2010: 40). “Locality” then, should be regarded as not just the “end point of top-down directives” but also the

“genesis of bottom-up initiatives,” which have transformational discursive potential (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007: 459).

**Table 1**  
***TESOL Professional identity construction***

<b>Level</b>	<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Theoretical construct</b>	<b>Issues</b>
<b>Macro:</b> Level of societies and ‘globality’	<b>Discourse:</b> Generally accepted ways of regarding and interacting within society	Neoliberalism	Globalisation, commercialisation, “Othering” and racism
		TESOL professionalism	Commercialisation, multiple roles of TESOL practitioners, cultural politics and “Othering”
<b>Macro/ Mezzo:</b> Where society and institutions overlap and interact	<b>Discourse /practise:</b> ‘Conventional wisdom’ in practise	Discourse communities	Overlapping: See above and below
<b>Mezzo:</b> Institutional level	<b>Practise:</b> Institutionally accepted ways of performing professional duties	Communities of practise	Situated learning and identification, macrostructural influences, commercialisation
<b>Micro:</b> Individual level	<b>Practise:</b> Individually accepted ways of performing professional duties	Agent / TESOL practitioner	Agency, identity, discursive positioning and naturalisation, resistance, negotiation

In this chapter, I will begin with a brief discussion on theories of language teacher identity formation and the different ways in which language teachers come to identify themselves as professionals. I will then consider neoliberalism as a discourse that has become both pervasive internationally and also a major catalyst for TESOL professional identification. I will explain this phenomenon as it relates to commercialisation in education and recent conceptions of professionalism in TESOL, highlighting ways in which these may both be infused with discourses of neoliberalism. I will consider institutional management and teacher-student relations specifically as partial determinants of ‘local’ professional identities, though I will ultimately contextualise these in the wider discourse of neoliberal globalisation. I will also take the local context

into consideration, focusing on the role of communities of practising English language teachers in professional identity construction. Finally, I will emphasise the importance of individual agency in TESOL professional identity formation, though again I will consider ways in which this interacts with the discourse of neoliberalisation from a wider perspective.

### 3.1 Language teacher identities – theoretical perspectives

Teacher identity is understood as a “many-faceted phenomenon” and so it is difficult to access and understand its composite features in their full complexity (Edwards, 2009: 20). In recent years, teacher identity research has addressed professional identification processes of teachers, characteristics of teacher identity, and ways in which identity is represented by teachers (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Although this has not helped to formulate a universally accepted and explicitly stated theory that explains the process of teacher identification (Carson, 2005), teacher identity can generally be seen as the “personal experience and role of teachers in a given society” (Welmond, 2002: 42) and “the selfhood that educators bring to the classroom” (Cardelle-Elawar & Lisarraga, 2010: 294). The term also describes the ways in which people develop self-understandings as educators within particular social contexts (Olsen, 2008a: 3) and so is regarded as determined partly by life experience (Tsui, 2003).

Teacher identity formation involves the intersection of personality, pedagogy, politics, and reflection against the backdrop of socio-political contexts and is an “invention of situated activity in various communities” (Hoffman-Kip, 2005: 153). It is “dynamic and contested” (Welmond, 2002: 42) and may be reciprocally affected by “environments and social systems” (Cardelle-Elawar & Lisarraga, 2010: 294). English language teacher identities are individual estimations of “self-image” and “other image” (see Varghese et al., 2005: 40; Holliday, 2011; Trent, 2010, 2012) that are

“multiple, shifting, and in conflict” (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Varghese et al., 2005: 35; Trent, 2012), partly determined by ‘local’ and ‘global’ social, cultural and political contexts (see Breen, 2006, Crichton, 2010, Liu & Xu, 2011), and constructed, maintained, and negotiated discursively (Simon-Maeda, 2004, Varghese et al., 2005, Clarke, 2008).

TESOL professional identity, however, is also a “real world phenomenon,” that can reciprocally affect the working conditions of English language teachers and their standing in the communities in which they practise (Varghese et al., 2005: 40). These are substantive issues in language teaching that affect the ways in which educators regard themselves and the work that they do. Issues that are of particular importance to this study are transformations in the professional status of language teaching, the varying degrees to which language teachers may be “marginalised” by professional issues in education, and the nature of the changing relationships that exist between TESOL practitioners and their students (Varghese et al., 2005).

The assessments of TESOL professional identity outlined above are multiple and nebulous in their complexity, underscoring the notion that identity is a problematic construct that is not universally understood. An idea that is of particular significance to this study’s concept of language teacher professional identity, however, is the notion that identity is both discursive and practical in its construction (Trent, 2012). That is, English language teachers will identify with broad societal and international discourses, but also with local communities of practising educators when contemplating their place in society (though in the case of migrant TESOL practitioners, their relationships with ‘host’ societies can be compromised as they tend to be transient and may also be fairly marginal) and the work that they do.

For the purposes of this study, the discursive elements of identity construction will be regarded as ‘global’ or macrostructural ideologies that comprise the discourse of neoliberalism and justify the free market ethos of contemporary globality. The notion of “identity in practise” (Trent, 2012: 106) will signify communities of practise within English language teaching and their potential to affect individual TESOL professional identity formation. The TESOL practitioner as well will represent a migrant professional, typically of Western/BANA origin, who practises in various non-English speaking localities internationally. Of critical significance here is the idea that the global and the local do not exist independently or exclusively of one another; they are inextricably intertwined and mutually constitutive of TESOL practitioner identities.

In this study, individual professional identities are regarded as amalgamations of macrostructural influences, local dynamics, and individual subjectivities based upon life histories. The conceptual framework that underpins concepts of professional identity in the research context sees professional identity as a project of individual agency, but one that is strongly influenced by participation in local communities of practise. Communities of practise in turn are influenced by developments in TESOL professionalism and education, which are associated with the neoliberal reforms to social institutions seen in recent decades.

### **3.2 The discourse of neoliberalism**

In reviewing the contemporary practise of international English language teaching, one often encounters the idea that TESOL blurs “industry/profession distinctions” (Neilsen, 2009: 17) as commercialisation – along with the commodification and financialisation of the English language - has “colonised” language teaching and infuses the discourse of language teachers (Crichton, 2010: 109). The discourse of

commercialisation, however, is justified by the ideologies associated with neoliberalism, which also inscribe the processes of globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education (Crichton, 2010) – two developments that are of central importance to this study.

### **3.2.1 Neoliberalism, commercialisation, and identity**

Neoliberalism is a political and economic theory, an ideology, a “policy package” and a “mode of governance” (Steger & Roy, 2010: 11) that equates personal well-being and entrepreneurial freedom within societies that value free trade, free markets and the rights of private property (Harvey, 2005). It can also be seen as an “ideological project” that regards state planning of economies and various forms of collectivism as inherently totalitarian, and capitalism as democratic (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2010: 11). As with the concept of identity, however, there are a multitude of ways in which neoliberalism can be understood and conceptualised. Overall, neoliberalism is recognised as a macrostructural force with wide-ranging social, political and economic effects, but characterisations of its ‘essence’ remain opaque and difficult to elucidate with any degree of exactitude.

Neoliberalism has provided ideological justification for the process in which various forms of social life are subsumed into the free market, which, according to Holborow (2012) has become the central concern of most societies in recent decades. The adulation of the free market, further, has engendered a “privatisation cult” and a general disdain for undertakings that are materially nonproductive (Retamar, 2007: 148) to the extent that economic models alternate to capitalism have been rendered “almost literally unimaginable” (Michaels, 2006: 144, Phillipson, 2009: 135). This in turn has, crucially, prevented the development of a “language of critique” that would allow for a better understanding of neoliberal policies and their human consequences (Gounari, 2006: 78).

According to Reiner (2007), neoliberalism has become the “hegemonic discourse of our times” as it constitutes a “common sense, taken-for-granted orthodoxy” that underpins most public policy debates (1-2). Discourse, in this sense, is more than just communication or language; it involves the harmonisation of language with action, feelings, values, interactions and beliefs (Gee, 1999) and is “an element of social life” that interconnects closely with other elements (Fairclough, 2003: 3). Discourses can be seen as texts and (semiotic) “events” that are “locally and interactionally produced by situated agents” but are also dependent on the continuity of social practises and social structures (Fairclough, 2010: 75). Discourses, then, are ways of using language that may reflect and promote particular ways of viewing the world (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010: 46). For the purposes of this conceptual framework, the social structures and associated social practises that have flourished under neoliberalism are seen to be instrumental determinants of worldviews and communication – particularly in a commercialised industry with a globalising ethos such as English language teaching.

Neoliberalism then, may have become a kind of “public pedagogy” and cultural politics (Giroux, 2004: xxv), which represents “hegemonic political thought” in many societies (Braedley, & Luxton, 2010: 10) and the “common sense of our era” (Connell, 2010: 22). “Neoliberalisation,” in fact, has become entangled in the construction of new identities, with entrepreneurship and “individualisation” at their foundations (Willis, Smith, & Stenning, 2008: 3) and a kind of “possessive individualism” that guides the enterprising “ideal citizen” (Apple, 2006: 29) as a “market-driven individual” (Holborow, 2012: 42). This understanding is also pertinent to English language teaching, which is regarded - even by its practitioners - as an “entrepreneurial culture” that is market-oriented and thus “unregulated” and “inherently unstable” (Thornbury, 2010: 1).



More extreme assessments of neoliberalisation see it as a process that has eroded the very notion of society in favour of the person (Block, 2012) as a “free self-actualising individual” (Braedley & Luxton, 2010: 11) whose “democratic impulses” are channelled towards “narrow economic relations” (Giroux, 2004: 106). These analyses resonate with what Thomas and Malau-Aduli (2013) term the “neoliberalist ideology” that currently dominates higher education, where “hyperindividualism and survival-of-the-fittest mentalities erode collegiality” (35). The predominant narratives associated with neoliberalism then, see individuals as independent and competitive “economic units” of “human capital” whose value (as such) is determined by their potential to realise “productive outcomes” (Holborow, 2012: 48).

The discourse of neoliberalism can be seen as a set of ideologies underpinning and justifying the increasingly market-oriented outlook embraced by many ‘modern’ and ‘modernising’ societies. These ideologies can also be associated with international and local influences on identity formation in general life and in professional contexts. It is important to note here, however, that identities are infused with a multitude of discourses, all of which can be taken up and transformed in many different ways by social actors. Neoliberalisation then, should not be regarded as the exclusive determinant of social identities - including English language teacher professional identities. It is, however, a prominent one and this is especially true in an industry such as TESOL (see below) in a ‘globalising’ context where education is utilised to maximise access to the knowledge economies of contemporary globality.

### 3.2.2 Neoliberalism and ‘Othering’

Aside from the manner in which neoliberalisation can affect worldviews and identity construction, it may also have ‘cultural’ effects on societies and populations within them. This is significant because it involves

the connections between Anglo-American dominance in world markets and English as a “capitalist neoimperial language” (Phillipson, 2009: 132). While this assessment of neoliberal discourse is contentious, it is of direct significance to the concept of TESOL professional identities as so much of English language teaching involves intercultural communication and (mis)understanding. In fact, one of the main issues in TESOL professionalism (discussed below in section 3.5) is the development of social and political awareness in teaching practise, given the situation of TESOL in socially and politically diverse contexts internationally (Leung, 2009).

In the era of neoliberal globalisation – particularly in recent decades – flows of capital have been ‘liberalised’ and new means of generating wealth have proliferated. As a result of neoliberal policy enactments, however, wealth and resources have been allocated primarily to those whose “class, race and power” has privileged them (Giroux, 2004: xxiii). Globally, neoliberal policies have widened the “obnoxious [wealth] gap” that exists between ‘developed’ and ‘undeveloped’ nations by excluding much of the world’s population from access to resources such as education and healthcare (Macedo & Gounari, 2006: 12). The characterisation of “underdeveloped” countries as “nonwhite” and “Other” (Said, 1978; Macedo & Gounari, 2006: 12) in the “dominant racialised discourse” of neoliberalism in developed countries (Macedo & Gounari, 2006: 12) may also have compounded the divide that seems to exist between the two ‘worlds.’

Internationally, neoliberalisation may be regarded – according to more critical perspectives - as a “deeply racialised and racist project” (Lissovoy, 2008: 91; Braedley & Luxton, 2010), which perpetuates “colonial domination” and regards white Western European and North American Christians as “inherently superior” to people from other parts of the world (Braedley & Luxton, 2010: 16). The philosophies underlying neoliberalism

are “fundamentally raced” and produce “racialised subjectivities,” while simultaneously disadvantaging racialised groups (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010: 1). Again, this is due to the reasoning - justified by neoliberalism – that social inequality, the widening wealth gap, and human suffering are not related to social problems. They are instead, connected to irresponsible personal choices or “issues of character,” which are best left to individuals to “solve” through hard work (Gounari, 2006: 82).

In recent years, however, the term ‘race’ has become stigmatised as evocative of racism and “overt forms of bigotry” as opposed to a site at which to access and interrogate societal inequalities (Kubota & Lin, 2006: 472). Issues of diversity have come to be described in cultural (versus religious, ethnic, or racial) terms and so culture, unfortunately, has become a potentially “euphemistic catch-all for racism” (Clayton, 2003: 23). In some cases, individuals will attach “social significance” to perceived ‘cultural differences’ (Thomas, 2010: 70) between themselves and others (in other words, they ascribe racialised identities to them - see Thomas, 2010: 70, for example), which they frame in the ‘language’ of neoliberalism (as defined above).

Within ‘neoliberalised’ societies, both racial identity and racism have also been “subsumed under the auspices of meritocracy” (Davis, 2007: 350, in Roberts & Mahtani, 2010) and so individuals operate under the notion that ‘success’ is entirely a private matter and equally accessible to all (Gounari, 2006). The key understanding here is that all social actors are considered ‘equal’ in neoliberal societies, and thus able to compete (also assuming that competition is a viable foundation upon which to construct a society) – regardless of the backgrounds and resources they bring to the competition or their relative inclination toward competition (Giroux, 2004, Gounari, 2006, Davis, 2008).

It should be reiterated here, however, that neoliberalism is neither a clearly understood, nor clearly defined phenomenon (Plehwe, 2009). It is not an entity in and of itself, nor is it a unified and static system of governance that exists separately from humanity and is immune to reform. I do not mean to suggest either that neoliberalism is simply a product of ‘Western’ society, or that it is somehow inherently racist (or culturally chauvinistic) and benefits only one cultural group while harming all others. The fact remains, however, that neoliberal policy enactments have had the effect of marginalising racialised ‘cultural’ Others - both Western and non-Western – internationally in recent decades. Further, the ideologies associated with neoliberalism have functioned to justify these asymmetries of power and naturalised the assumption that they are the responsibility of individuals - not the societies in which they live – to resolve.

All of this has perpetuated a kind of systemic racism that – while it should not be considered an inevitable outcome of neoliberalisation – can be regarded as “mutually constitutive with neoliberalising policies” (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010: 250). While precisely identifying and delineating this widespread racism is “not straightforward,” it involves categorising, judging, and excluding racialised groups as “the inferior Other” and “maintaining the status quo of the Self” (Kubota & Lin, 2006: 477). Racism then, is both discursive and practical as it constructs and perpetuates imbalances of power through the “inferiorisation” of the Other (Kubota & Lin, 2006: 478).

It is not entirely clear then, exactly how neoliberalisation and racialisation are intertwined, though neoliberal policy enactments have functioned to marginalise members of ‘Other’ (non-Western) cultures. Roberts and Mahtani (2010) argue that scholarship must “do more than map how processes of neoliberalisation have racialised results” (248) by demonstrating ways in which it “actively produces racialised bodies” (248). Research in TESOL as well can investigate ways in which English as an

international language can disadvantage members of ‘Other’ cultures who speak ‘Other’ languages, and how TESOL practitioners may take up particular attitudes toward these cultures (Palfreyman, 2005). “Otherisation” then, can be seen as a ‘strand’ of TESOL practitioner identity and a lens through which to interpret attitudes exhibited by TESOL practitioners toward students as members of “Other” cultures (Holliday, 2011: 77).

### **3.2.3 The neoliberal metanarrative and human agency**

A consideration that is of significance to the concept of English language teacher identity is that no single theory ‘explains’ the identity constructions of language teachers in all of their intricacy (Varghese et al., 2005). In fact, theorising English language teacher identity can limit “visions of and insights into the complex world of teacher identity” and so might be best avoided altogether according to Phan (2008: 11). Varghese et al. (2005) as well, discourage subscription to “all-powerful grand narratives” or metanarratives (such as neoliberalisation and its importance in identity construction) when theorising language teacher identities, as there is no “rationalistic and deductive universal [theoretical] model” that can explain TESOL professional identity formation and claim to be ideologically neutral (24).

In contemplating neoliberalism as a significant contributory factor to TESOL professional identity formation then, one risks being deterministic and discounting the agentive potentiality within all social actors. While this study does not claim to have achieved ideological neutrality, it does acknowledge the inherent complexity of professional identities as but constituents of more diverse, unique, and intricately multidimensional individuals. It also recognises that the discourse of neoliberalism is one of many possible discourses available to TESOL practitioners (though it is an especially virulent one, as I argue below). It is important to acknowledge

not only the myriad components of professional identity construction then, but also the capacity of the professional to identify with or reject these – to ‘be’ whomever he or she chooses to be.

An idea that is of central importance to this study, however, is the notion of discursive naturalisation and the ways in which people’s language practises can mix “various proportions” of problematisation with the accepted commonsense “truths” of neoliberal philosophies that sometimes remain unexamined (Fairclough, 1992: 6). New practises and “ideological representations” for example, often become taken-for-granted, non-ideological “background knowledge,” which helps to regulate social life and enables people to function socially (Fairclough, 2010: 31). People may be unaware, though, of the “ideological dimensions of the subject positions they occupy” when they communicate (Fairclough, 2010: 44). In many cases people are oblivious to both the social determinations and the effects of discourse that are “opaque” and difficult to recognise, let alone elucidate (Fairclough, 2010: 31).

This can be detrimental to people because it can, in some instances, lead them to uncritically adopt conciliatory positions toward existing social orders that may ultimately serve to disadvantage or marginalise them (Breen, 2006, 2007; Crichton, 2010). In this way, people may also fail to see the connections between “micro events” and “macro structures” (Fairclough, 2010: 31), sometimes taking a critical view of local practises, but failing to acknowledge the influence of the “broader economic, social, and political context” (Crichton, 2010: 84) upon the “shape and character” of the local environment (Fuller, 2007: 27).

This is particularly true in the context of international English language teaching in higher education, where much of a teacher’s professional practise ultimately involves globalisation, internationalisation, and capitalism, but may seem at times to be limited to the technical aspects

of language learning (Breen, 2006, 2007). It is not always easy to appreciate the degree to which English language teaching and neoliberalisation are intertwined (Crichton, 2010). Given the prominence of the English language in globalisation and the subordination of higher education “to the handmaiden of corporate culture” (Giroux, 2002:105) in the international knowledge economy, however, it seems unlikely that TESOL professionalism has escaped neoliberalism’s “massive assault on the world” (Chun, 2009: 112). Neoliberalism then, should be regarded as a relevant – though sometimes overlooked - element of TESOL professionalism, in my opinion.

In fact, connecting “micro relations of language use” - such as a conversation in English - to “macro relations of social context” – such as “global capitalist relations,” (Pennycook, 2001: 65) - is one of the “great challenges” with which critical applied linguistics should concern itself (Pennycook, 2001: 64). In recent years, however, “the notion of the local” has taken on new significance as a focus of social science research – partly in reaction to the determinism and “ungrounded theorising” of metanarratives (Pennycook, 2010: 1). Nevertheless, it may not be necessary (or advisable perhaps) to “abandon, as so many have done, all grand narratives” pertaining to neoliberal globalisation and its “explanatory potential” for identity construction (Block, Gray & Holborow, 2012: 11).

### 3.3 TESOL professionalism

In the following section, I will examine TESOL professionalism as it interacts with education systems and market forces, potentially affecting the process of language teacher identification. I will consider the commercialisation of TESOL and its implications for teacher professionalism. I will also contemplate various ways in which the numerous and sometimes conflicted roles ascribed to TESOL practitioners

can destabilise their identities as professionals. Finally, I will look at the cultural politics of TESOL, focusing on the issue of ‘Othering’ and how this might be considered an element of professionalism for itinerant TESOL professionals working in various zones of intercultural communication globally.

### 3.3.1 Commercialisation

Along with the neoliberal reconfiguration of the individual as an economic actor, social institutions have undergone transformations that have more closely aligned them to economic interests in recent decades. Higher education, for example, while it was once a “social activity in the cultural sphere,” has become a “feeder activity to the economy” (Holborow, 2012: 48) that utilises an “industrial style of enterprise” to meet the needs of that economy (Wolf, 2002: 2). English language teaching, though smaller in scale and situated “within a particular community of professionals” (Breen, 2007: 1068), is not immune to these changes and has expanded both as a “commercial enterprise” and a “global commodity” in the era of globalisation (Neilsen, 2009: 85, 86).

In many ways, conceptions of professionalism in English language teaching are infused with commercialism arising from the logic of neoliberalism (Crichton, 2010). This has become a constituent of TESOL practitioner identities as it pertains directly to becoming an educator and what constitutes ‘best practise’ for language teachers. One of the main themes in accounts of TESOL professionalism is the conflict that arises when the demands of educational ‘authorities’ supersede the professional judgment of English language teachers as educators. This prevalence of official control over teaching practise is what Leung (2009) refers to as “sponsored professionalism” (49), which is frequently embodied in standards devised by “regulatory bodies” aimed at the maintenance of



“desirable professionalism” among teachers (50). An important aspect of this regulation is its connection to public accountability measures associated with the “ideological prominence of market forces” that currently predominates in many social settings (Leung, 2009: 52).

Identifying desirable professionalism, however, is complicated by the fact that its parameters shift over time and across contexts. Universal standards as well, are often introduced by non-practising policy makers and may be considered unsuitable at the level of professional practise (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002). Official conceptions of professionalism then, are confounded by the criticality of educators, who may question the validity of sponsored teacher knowledge, eschewing it in favour of their own sense of “independent professionalism” (Leung, 2009: 53). This connects with what Stronach et al. (2002) refer to as an “economy of performance” and its inevitable conflicts with “ecologies of practise,” when identity and professionalism collide with the market-driven “audit culture” (109-110).

This “irresolvable” collision is, in fact, so prominent, that it is a central feature of professional identity for educators, who live in tension between standardised requirements/measures of performance and personal professional judgment (Stronach et al., 2002: 122, 130). In the past, this conflict had been partly resolved by the authority of teachers to exercise “discretionary judgment” when making decisions in the classroom (Day, 1999: 5). More recently, however, educators have experienced an “erosion of autonomy” in terms of applying professional judgment to practise (Day, 1999: 6). In English language teaching, this “appropriation of professionalism” has been evidenced in stricter controls over what and how teachers should teach, increasing levels of accountability and unstable working conditions (Breen, 2007: 1067).

The marginalisation of TESOL practitioners described above can, paradoxically, empower them in the sense that they can engage in “quiet but effective” resistance toward educational management that is unable to monitor their daily classroom activity closely (Johnston, 2002: 108). That is, they can actually exercise “discretionary judgment” when teaching (Day, 1999: 5), but not in an officially recognised way. This is noteworthy because it describes a manner in which teachers can demonstrate agency - albeit in a limited way – through their detachment from officially sanctioned institutional pedagogies. In fact, it can also be seen as an element within the broader theme of detachment (discussed below), which is used to interpret the research data in this study.

### 3.3.2 Multiple and unstable identities

One of the theoretical understandings that underpins the conceptual framework supporting this study is that English language teacher identities are shifting, multiple and conflicted. English language teachers – particularly those working in foreign ‘intercultural’ contexts - take on a number of social and cultural roles that comprise their professional identities; they can for example, be educators, expatriate professionals, ‘native’ (or ‘non-native’) speakers, TESOL practitioners, political actors, and members of societal institutions (Duff & Uchida, 1997). These ‘multiple identities’ are neither fixed nor stable; they are, rather, transfigured, negotiated and (re)constructed continuously through language (Duff & Uchida, 1997). They may at times, however, also come into conflict and frustrate a teacher’s efforts to establish a unified system of practise or otherwise identify with a personal vision of professionalism.

According to Pennington (2002), the “complex of overlapping multiple identities” available to English language teachers need not confound their (development of a stable) sense of professional self (2).

Instead, it can be seen as a “composite professional identity” that encompasses professional awareness, motivation, standards, loyalty and commitment on the part of language teachers (Pennington, 2002: 2). Pennington (2002) stresses the importance of “English language specialists” being highly motivated by professional standing in the ESOL community, occupational position in a specific school or community, ideological support for the value of English language learning, and “feelings of solidarity, loyalty, and commitment” toward their employers and the greater communities of which they are a part (Pennington, 2002: 2).

While this idealised vision of TESOL practise is theoretically feasible, it may be practically impossible to attain in many contexts due to a number of “substantive” concerns that can complicate the professional lives of English language teachers and encumber their development of stable professional identities (Varghese et al., 2005). Teachers may, for example, be marginalised in their professional contexts as the changing nature of institutional management subordinates their professional prerogatives to the priorities of their managers (Crichton, 2010). Their workplaces may demand that they conform to institutional visions of “appropriate delivery” of curricula, which conflict with the recommendations of educational research and require degrees of “performativity” on the part of both the teachers and their students (Breen, 2006: 208).

Their status as professionals has also been threatened by the increasing “instability and changeability” of the English language teaching profession (Varghese et al., 2005: 23); the conditions in which English language teachers work are, in many cases, unstable, and teachers are in a “state of reflexive alertness” and distrustful of previously acquired knowledge, such as professionalism in teaching, as a result (Breen, 2006: 208). This is due, in part, to “shifting pedagogic imperatives” and “rapid

changes” embodied in imported educational standards and curricula that may not be well suited to local educational contexts (Breen, 2007: 1070).

As migrant workers, English language teachers often relocate (Neilsen, 2009) and need to continually upgrade their qualifications in order to keep up with professional or industry requirements (Breen, 2006). This constant change has become part of the lives of teachers and demands a degree of flexibility that generates feelings of uncertainty in the professional selves of language teachers (Breen, 2006). Insecurity is thus a facet of teacher identity, particularly among “contractually employed” language teachers (Breen, 2006: 207). As a professional field as well, TESOL may be characterised as “unstable, marginalised, and impermanent” with low salaries, few prospects for promotion, and inadequate job security (Neilsen et al., 2007: 6). Many teachers, in fact, question the possibility of a “career” in English language teaching, such is its transience and variability as an occupation (Johnston, 2003).

English language teaching, as well, differs from “mainstream” teaching because it encapsulates elements of both a profession and an industry (Neilsen et al., 2007: 1). The industrialisation of TESOL has engendered conflicts between its educative and economic natures that complicate language teaching; the commercial traits of the profession undermine the identities of teachers as professionals, repositioning them as “service provider[s]” (Breen, 2007: 1072) who must also embrace “market-friendly practises” within a “customer care culture” (Thornbury, 2010: 1). As the English language - with its status as the international lingua franca - facilitates the activity of the “globalised market economy” (Thornbury, 2010: 1), so too is the TESOL profession heavily commercialised in its promotion, administration, and general objectives (Crichton, 2010). Even English language programs within universities may function as “discursive space[s] of neoliberalism” where the logic of the free market infuses the

practise of language teaching (Chun, 2009: 111).

TESOL professionalism is a central element of English language teacher identities and is infused with an amalgam of educational and commercial philosophies. In many ways, the market driven imperatives of TESOL practise can be regarded as a result of neoliberal discourse and policy enactments, which also form strands of TESOL practitioner identities. These do not necessarily sit well with TESOL practise or teacher identities, however. In some cases, they are diametrically opposed to the values that educators espouse as fundamental to appropriate professionalism and ‘real’ education. The neoliberalised ethos of TESOL and the fundamental conflicts that this creates within TESOL as educational practise are, in my opinion, at the heart of TESOL practitioner identities and the theme of professional conflict is a significant one through which to analyse the research data collected in conducting this study (see chapter 5).

### **3.3.3 Cultural politics and professionalism**

As English language teachers work in a multitude of diverse international contexts, it is important that they develop professional attitudes that are sensitive to social and political issues (Leung, 2009: 50). As a principal component of professional practise, TESOL pedagogy would benefit from being both responsive to the linguistic needs of students and mindful of the societies to which students belong (Leung, 2009). Language teachers then, might do well to understand that cultures and communities meet and coexist within their classrooms and they are central to a process of social and educational “interethnic and intercultural communication” (Breen, 2007: 1079). English language study programs as “global education contact zones,” however, are not simply areas of equitable and untroubled cultural exchange (Singh & Doherty, 2004: 11). They can also be regarded as Western neocolonial sites where marketised “dominant knowledge” is

disseminated by way of a “dominant language” (Singh & Doherty, 2004: 11, 12).

This is an allusion to the “centre-periphery paradigm,” which is contentious because it is based on “simplistic cultural definitions” and “over-generalis[ation]” (Holliday, 1999: 243-244). It is also, however, an example of how the ‘multiple identities’ of English language teachers (as both teachers and members of ‘dominant Western cultures,’ for example) can create tension when they come into conflict with the perceived identities of others (students as members of ‘Other’ cultures)(Duff & Uchida, 1997). While studying English can be liberating for students in some ways, it can simultaneously subordinate them to “domination” even within classrooms (Edge, 1996: 17). The “intrinsic hierarchical nature” of the teacher-student relationship in many TESOL contexts, for example, can complicate and ultimately stunt relationships between students and teachers – particularly beyond the immediate classroom/teaching-learning setting (Varghese et al., 2005: 23).

### 3.3.4 TESOL and Othering

According to Said (2003), the “ontologically unstable” ideological construction of ‘the West’ as a familiar cultural entity is dependent upon the identification and subsequent affirmation of a relatively mysterious cultural “Other” (xii). While this dichotomy has often been articulated in representations of “Islam and the Arabs on one side” and “Westerners on the other,” (Said, 2003: xiii), it is also invoked more generally to position ‘the West’ as superior to the non-Western “Orient” (Said, 1978: 7).

English language teaching is a professional undertaking in which the meeting of this recognisable “West” and the “foreign Other” is “poignant” (Holliday, 2011: 77) and contributes to the “distilling and delimiting” of English language teacher identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997: 454). In fact, this

‘foreign Other’ is a “major source of professional alignment” for Western TESOL practitioners and a dichotomy from which they derive a sense of “professional exclusivity” (Holliday, 2005: 27). This may be expressed in “sociocultural inequalities” that can “inscribe” the discursively co-constructed selfhood of language teachers (Liu & Xu, 2011: 590, Simon-Maeda, 2004), as they harbor “uninspected and dominant-culture identities” (Hofman-Kip, 2008: 151), which are “inherently racialised” (Motha, 2006: 514). These have become parts of the “psychological baggage” that teachers may bring to social interactions within their profession, and can affect the attitudes that they display toward individuals (students) and the social groups to which they belong (Wright, 1987: 21).

A great deal of “cultural research” conducted within the domain of TESOL, as well, misrepresents cultures by exhibiting them as monolithic and static, reinforcing stereotypes about them and casting them as ‘culturalised’ “Others” (Snowden, 2007: 307). English language teachers may also imagine or ‘reify’ cultures as material entities, objects, or places “within which and by which people live” (Holliday et al., 2010: 26), according the notion of ‘culture’ more importance than the individuals who are part of the cultural group (in terms of defining who they are) and thereby ‘essentialising’ them (Holliday et al., 2010: 1).

Essentialist categorisations might seem like effective ways to comprehend the fundamental differences that divide cultures, but they can also lead to chauvinistic statements like, “in Middle Eastern culture there is no concept of individualised critical thinking” (Holliday, 2011: 4). They may also represent cultures in “reductionist and unidimensional” ways (see Harklau, 1999: 122), reducing the observed behaviour of people who belong to a cultural group to a simple factor that causes the identified behaviour (such as membership in the group) (Holliday et al., 2010: 1). Thus what people from a particular cultural group say or do will be regarded as simply a

consequence of their cultural identity, denying them any kind of human agency, casting them as unidimensional, and reinforcing stereotypes that may exist regarding the cultural groups to which they belong.

English language teachers will sometimes stereotype students when they behave in ‘unexpected’ ways (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Teachers may, for example, describe ‘Asian’ students as though they were a culturally homogeneous group, characterising them as blindly obedient, lacking in critical thinking skills and overly passive (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 54) particularly when many of them do not behave as ‘Western’ students might in similar situations. They may also “tribalise” or otherwise stereotype “Others” in the process of constructing their “sociocultural” identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997: 454). Holliday et al. (2010) for example, identify “British people” in particular as engaging in this kind of discursive cultural reification:

British people in very diverse foreign locations commonly see the ‘locals’ as ‘subservient, hierarchical, corrupt, inhibited by extended families and arranged marriages, lacking in individualism, unable to make decisions’ and so on. Such descriptions are more likely to be British constructions of the opposite of what they consider themselves to be than grounded in the behaviour they see around them (13).

While characterising ‘British people’ in this way might itself be seen as a kind of essentialism (and a reductionist ascription of this sort of behaviour to being British), the description is useful because it exemplifies a manner in which people (including English language teachers in non-Western contexts) can construct stereotypes regarding the foreign ‘Other’ by assuming a superior ideological position to that ‘Other’ (Holliday, 2011).

The political nature of English language teaching is an important element of professionalism and identity for TESOL practitioners who engage in intercultural communication and must form cross-cultural



relationships, whatever their nature, with students. In a globalising educational context, issues of language, power, economics and culture will inevitably overlap and will likely figure prominently in the professional identity construction of TESOL practitioners. These are the ‘macrostructural’ forces that shape the English language-teaching world and infuse the practise of English language teachers, whether or not they are aware of it (Breen, 2007).

The racialised aspects of TESOL do not necessarily arise as a direct result of neoliberalisation and its associated ideologies, but it may be that there is some ‘overlap’ between the inherently racialised nature of neoliberalism and that of TESOL – particularly as the two entities are intertwined in the era of globalisation and internationalised higher education, where TESOL practise is mobilised in the service of the free market economy. The concept of racialised identities as integral to TESOL professionalism is also a theme that interacts with the alienation of TESOL practitioners from the communities in which they work (see chapter 2) and is valuable as it can be subsumed under the theme of alienation and can also be used to interpret the interview data collected during this study.

### **3.4 Communities of practise**

In addition to its interaction with macrostructural influences, identity formation can also be regarded as a social process that occurs in social/institutional (mezzo-level) contexts (Hoffman-Kip, 2008) and involves the interaction between and within groups and societies (Menter, 2010). Social or group theories of identity recognise identity-in-practise as it relates to individual participation in collective activities; this is applicable to language teacher identity, which can be regarded in terms of an individual teacher’s identification or “nonidentification” with a larger group of

educators, and his or her practises relating to that group (Varghese et al., 2005: 39).

An individual's "work behaviour" may reflect a "shared, social identity" that is discursively co-constructed between those engaged in a common undertaking (Carr, 2010: 2). The theory of communities of practise (CoPs) arises from this understanding as it involves groups of individuals – often in a workplace – developing understandings of what they do and how they do it by communicating with one another. This model of learning involves identifying and sharing knowledge with others in the process of personal and collective professional development and identification (Pennington, 2002). It subscribes to the concept that language and identity are mutually constitutive (Edwards, 2009), and so people's identities can be "negotiated" (Johnston, 2003: 99) through the sharing and learning of the "linguistic resources" (Hall, 2002: 34) requisite to successful practise. The theory has been well received in the social sciences because it provides a crucial "middle-level theory between structure and agency" to demonstrate a manner in which socialisation may be partly group oriented (Barton & Tusting, 2005: 3).

In TESOL research as well, communities of practise figure prominently in accounts of TESOL professional identification (Clarke, 2008, Takahashi, 2011, Varghese, 2000). Social interaction in the 'TESOL workplace' then, can be regarded as an important component of professional identity development – not simply a reflexive social activity. The role of the community of practise in the socialisation of TESOL practitioners, however, should not be limited to the local or even professional level. It can also be connected with 'discourses' from broader social and political contexts that will have implications in practise and, ultimately, identity. In this section, I will outline the theoretical underpinnings of the CoP model before considering the role of discourse in

their activity and its potential effects on TESOL practitioner identity construction. In particular, I will consider the effects of commercialisation on TESOL communities of practise within the larger discourse of neoliberal globalisation.

### **3.4.1 Situated learning and identification**

The central reasoning underpinning the communities of practise model is that when people are collectively engaged in a particular endeavour or enterprise – such as English language teaching - they will, in many cases learn (through sharing and negotiation) a collection of particular practises, including ways of doing things and of talking about what they do (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998, Block, 2007, Kumaravadivelu, 2008). They may also share understandings of what the collective endeavour means in their lives and for their communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Kimble & Hildreth, 2004: 2).

It should be noted here, however, that a community of practise can take on a “multiple, uncertain, and shifting character” – particularly in higher education where evolving social and institutional factors may supersede the autonomy of communities of practise in meaning making (James, 2007: 131). In fact, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) conception of communities of practise neglects the dynamic quality of these groups – particularly in terms of the way they may reproduce “external pressures” upon the organisation (or industry) in which they are situated (James, 2007: 136). As well, the notion of ‘membership’ as it is associated with communities of practise, may belie the fluid nature of participation in these communities (Gee, 2005: 214); the demarcations of the community are not always clear and members may come and go with rapidity and regularity (Gee, 2005).

In TESOL, for example, communities of practise may not be limited to particular geographical locations or institutions, but to TESOL practitioners across contexts internationally. Thus ‘community’ members might be regarded as sharing a kind of professional discourse without having actually met one another or worked in the same locality. So the notion of ‘community’ can be misleading as members of the community are not necessarily tightly bound by a professional activity such as English language teaching.

Still, one of the basic contentions underpinning the communities of practise model is that people do “identity work” when they share thinking and practise with others in particular social activities (such as English language teaching) (Block, 2007: 27). Involvement in communities of practise sees community members participating in social units to the extent of learning how to understand particular (community-related) situations and apply that understanding to their local (community-related) contexts (Block, 2007). Participants collectively negotiate meaning and practise; they are brought together by the activities in which they engage and they share available resources to succeed in their respective practises (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, Takahashi, 2011, Nagatomo, 2012). While membership in the community is not the sole determinant of an individual’s professional identity, his or her participation in the community will involve a degree of socialisation culminating in identification (or “non-identification”) with other members (Varghese et al., 2005: 39).

Thus individuals learn by relating socially to – and identifying with – others (Fuller, 2007) and applying their acquired knowledge in the same circumstances. So learning – as a process of identification – is “situated” in the setting that encompasses the community of practise (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The knowledge generated within the community of practise then, may be co-constructed by participants and revolve around concerns central

to the particular context in which the group functions (Lave & Wenger, 1991), though the communities of practise in which they work may be redefined and reconfigured at times by locally imposed managerial policies (James, 2007).

### **3.4.2 Macrostructural influences on communities of practise**

Just as the positions of individuals in the local communities of practise to which they belong can – to an extent - shape their professional identities, communities as well can be contextualised “within broader social structures” that affect local issues faced by communities of practise (Wenger, 1998: 148). Communities of practise are said to engage the processes of meaning negotiation, learning, development of practise, identity formation and “social configurations” and are a result of “complex interactions between the local and the global” (Wenger, 1998: 133). Communities of practise then, may also reproduce (and potentially develop) “broader systems of relations” than those in their immediate situation exclusively (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 53).

Another way in which to regard a community of practise is to consider the role of ‘discourse’ within the configuration of the group and the extent to which discourses may affect relations between group members and the various attitudes they adopt. According to Scollon and Scollon (2001), people who are engaged in similar broad social practises or who share particular social attributes – including English language teachers, for example – are “members” of a “discourse system” (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 95). The discourse system – being larger than a local community of practise - may employ a shared language or “jargon” (Thornbury, 2006: 98) and its community may engage in specific customs regarding the formation of intragroup relationships and learning to become community members (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 95). Members of the discourse system will also

identify themselves by making “references to local ‘in-group’ culture” (Thornbury, 2006: 98).

Systems of discourse may involve discursive forms, socialisation, and ideologies, which “mutually influence” one another (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 97). In “corporate discourse,” for example, members will tend to display a “common ideological position” and they may also share certain “extra-discourse features” such as experience, background, race, and language (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 165). A discourse system then, has a “governing philosophy” or “worldview” which can also be described as its ideology, according to Scollon and Scollon (2001: 165). English language teachers might be regarded as members of the same discourse system because of their commonly held travel – and “cross cultural” - experience, their membership in professional organisations and of course their teaching practise (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 209). In some cases, in fact, they may identify more with English language teachers in other contexts internationally than they do with “content” teachers in their own educational institutions (Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Pennington, 2002; Trent, 2010).

The discourse system of TESOL also operates to support members in individual career development; their professional ambitions may lead them to resist the institutional cultures of their workplaces in favour of personal career development and qualification (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Their professional “stance” then, can be described as relativistic and “anti-ideological” (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 211). They tend to oppose “the corporate ideological position,” particularly within universities, and operate with a minimum level of commitment to it in their day-to-day teaching practise (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 211).

Social engagement within smaller communities of practise, however, can also reflect institutional, national and global ideologies in the form of

discourses that may be reproduced by local community members in their daily interactions (Varghese et al., 2005: 31). In some cases, the discourse of community members may even be permeated with discourses that are not (seemingly) directly related to the shared undertaking in which they are engaged. This resonates with Holliday's (1999) theory of "small cultures" or "discourse communities" in which "cohesive behaviour" within "social groupings" is seen to interact with larger discourses in a process of discursive "technologisation" (247-252; Crichton, 2010: 60; Fairclough, 2010: 126). While this technologisation occurs at the "mezzo" (or institutional) level, it can still be contextualised in terms of its susceptibility to broader societal discourses, ideologies, and even forces of imperialism (Holliday, 1999: 258).

Discourse communities, systems, and communities of practise exhibit a capacity to socialise members and direct their mutual identification, but it must be remembered that they do not exist without connection to broader social structures and discourses. While communities of practising TESOL professionals and their individual members may not assume "ideological positions" uncritically (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), they may harbor unexamined attitudes relating to 'larger' discourses that have social and political ramifications (Holliday, 2005; Hofman-Kip, 2008; Crichton 2010). 'Larger' discourses, for the purposes of this study, are associated with neoliberalism and the consumer oriented subjectivities that it has naturalised in the era of globalisation.

### **3.4.5 Communities of consumption**

Communities of practise are "a crucial locus of learning" (Wenger, 1998: 132) and the concept of engagement within a shared enterprise carries with it positive connotations of coherence and egalitarianism (Fuller, 2007). Communities of practise, however, are not necessarily "havens of

togetherness” nor are they “islands of intimacy” that are protected from politics or social relations (Wenger, 1998: 77, Crichton, 2010). They can, in fact, act as “the very locus” (Wenger, 1998: 132) of the reproduction of “power relations” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464) and negative dynamics, from “counterproductive patterns” to injustices, prejudices, racism, sexism, and “abuses of all kinds” (Wenger, 1998: 132). Communities of practise then, can be “transformative and beneficial” to their members and to the constituencies that they serve, just as they can be “constraining and detrimental” to both (Fonti, 2010: 114), depending on global and local developments and the reactions of communities and individuals to them.

One theoretical construct that is particularly useful in terms of its capacity to illuminate potential malignancies in ‘discourse communities’ is Crichton’s (2010) “community of consumption” (109). As the professional practise of English language teachers has responded to commercial pressures and is recalibrated according to the demands of the market, teachers may form what Crichton (2010) calls “communities of consumption” – where consumption signifies the commercial orientation of education with teachers and students framed as producers and consumers of knowledge respectively (184). Within these student-centred communities, professional practise, identities, and relationships are redefined according to market principles and economic imperatives. As participants in communities of consumption at educational institutions, teachers, students, and managers are often in conflict, though they are ‘members’ of the same community (Crichton, 2010).

Tension within the community of consumption is often related to the evaluation of students and the interests of teachers, students and managers that may diverge on this issue. Teachers practising in this kind of ‘community’ struggle to reconcile their understandings of professionalism



with the commercial imperatives of their employers; they become competitive and self-interested, working under insecure terms of employment (Crichton, 2010). They also tend to take a depoliticised view of the work that they do, restricting conceptions of professionalism to the technical aspects of language teaching. This is significant because it demonstrates a manner in which English language teachers may “participate in the marginalisation of ELT” by denying the connections between their work and the broader contexts of society, culture, and politics (Breen, 2007: 1068).

The notion that English language teachers may become detached from both globalisation and the sociocultural politics associated with their profession – and thereby perpetuate their own vulnerability to socioeconomic change - is recurrent in the literature (Crichton, 2010; Neilsen, 2009, Breen, 2006/2007, Varghese et al., 2005) and is a useful theme through which to examine and interpret research data collected during this study. A closely related strand of this theme of detachment is the denial of TESOL knowledge and practise as either socially or politically significant by TESOL practitioners themselves, who “enforce” their own marginalisation through this failure to appreciate their own importance (Johnston, 2003: 107). Both of these ideas are significant in this study as lenses through which to analyse the research data and also as ways in which to associate the marginalisation of TESOL practitioners with the subordination of all social actors who unwittingly reproduce subject positions that do not ultimately serve their own best interests (Fairclough, 2010).

While TESOL practitioners may distance themselves from the ‘smaller’ “corporate ideologies” of their employers then (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 211), they may also inadvertently reproduce – and thereby submit to - ‘larger’ institutional discourses simultaneously (Crichton, 2010). These

include discourses that embody the taken for granted logic of neoliberalism as justification for increased commercialisation in TESOL and in education (Crichton, 2010). Their tacit acceptance of these conventions can also be seen to connect with the devaluation of TESOL professionalism; through their participatory role in their own subordination to the commercial exigencies of neoliberal globalisation, TESOL practitioners become less professional and more entrepreneurial (Crichton, 2010).

According to Crichton (2010), the community of consumption is a community of practise in which the “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977: 20, cited in Crichton, 2010) of teachers is colonised by market forces that are “beyond their control or knowledge” (186). This is a salient example of the manner in which communities of practise may have “less than benign effects” on members (Fuller, 2007: 20), though it assumes that teachers are unable to either detect or resist the assumed sociopolitical inevitabilities of globalisation. As a community of practise, however, the community of consumption is also fundamentally “uncertain and shifting,” (James, 2007: 131) with the potential to engage with and reject discursive technologisation. According to Fonti (2010), in fact, all communities of practise will experience tension and resistance, conflict, struggle, inequality, and division and these issues need to be part of the theoretical framework of any study that explores communities of practise.

### **3.5 Discourse, identity and agency**

The development of TESOL professional identities should not be regarded as exclusively “determined by social structures and discourses” (Clarke, 2008: 27); understanding the role of the TESOL professional community (or culture) in its members’ discursive co-construction of reality should involve an equal consideration of both human agency and social structure – a balance between the two dynamisms. When attempting to

explain human behaviour or even “reality” (as it is perceived by individuals) then, it is important not to overprivilege cause-and-effect-type reasoning that understands social relations as predictable and uniform across contexts.

Social ‘reality’ is multifaceted and cannot be explained through a simple one-to-one mapping of language and human thought patterns (Scollon et al., 2012). That is, people do not think, speak and act in a constant and predictable way based upon cultural socialisation facilitated by discourse. It is perhaps for this reason that theories of identity tend to “veer back and forth between structuralism and poststructuralism” (Block, 2007: 14); critical explorations of identity acknowledge its political nature and connect it to “power relations in particular sites of practise” (Fotheringham, 2006: i), while also respecting its position as a project of individual human agency.

Identity, as well, is not only relational but also interactional – environmental factors shape the identities of social actors, but their identities can also affect the environments in which they live and work (Varghese et al., 2005). Lave and Wenger (1991), for example, recognise the dialectical relationship that exists between “agent, activity and the world” and their reciprocally determinative nature (33). They also acknowledge the hazards of “structural determination” and identify social actors as intentional and reflective beings (that may, nonetheless, operate within the social structures that communities of practise create and reproduce) (54). Gee (1999), as well, uses the term “reflexivity” to describe the ways that language both reflects and constructs reality simultaneously (82), which relates to the notion that language and identity are “mutually constitutive” (Trent, 2010: 3). Thus individuals can discursively co-construct knowledge, social structures, and ‘reality’ as opposed to simply reproducing social orders and unexamined ideologies.

Individuals, however, may also come to identify with “subject positions” related to ‘larger’ discourses through the implementation of their professional activities within institutions (Trent, 2012: 106). As members of an institution, they may be “subjected” to an “institutional frame” that both facilitates and constrains their “social action[s]” with respect to the shared undertaking of which they are a part (Fairclough, 2010: 41). As ‘subjects’ then, members of institutions may “position” themselves discursively (Trent, 2012: 106) in such a way as to align with institutional “formulations and symbolisations of a particular set of ideological representations” (Fairclough, 2010: 41). This type of identification through social reproduction is what Davies and Harre (1999, in Trent, 2012) describe as “first order positioning,” a construct that can aid in the understanding of TESOL professional identification (Trent, 2012: 106).

This is not to deny the possibility of resistance, challenge or negotiation in taking up institutional discourses (Trent, 2012) and this process of determination should be recognised as dialectical and not “mechanical” (Fairclough, 2010: 40). In the case of TESOL professional identification, for example, it is important to understand that TESOL practitioners will sometimes question conflicting institutional discourses by taking ‘socially antagonistic’ stances toward one or the other (or both) (Trent, 2012: 107). In some instances, however, this can involve Western teachers in foreign cross-cultural environments taking up condescending or otherwise disdainful attitudes toward local discourse and practise (Trent, 2012). These may also interact with Western teachers’ perceptions of ‘non-Western’ societies, which are sometimes founded upon naturalised assumptions of ‘Western’ superiority and expressed in negative evaluations of local practises (Trent, 2012).

Overall, it is important to appreciate the multiple identities and different levels of participation that members bring to communities of

practise in which they share understandings about what they do and what it means to them (Varghese et al., 2005). Like all individuals, they may be “products of their own social histories” and of social structures but are agentive nonetheless (Olsen, 2008b: 24) and function as “active, reflective agents in the ongoing construction of social reality” (Block & Cameron, 2002: 4). The classrooms in which they teach, similarly, should not be regarded as simple reflections of social orders, just as they should not be considered zones of “entirely free-willed activity” (Pennycook, 2001: 118).

People may draw upon “ascribed and appropriated...constellations of historically laden social identities” when they communicate, and, although these identities influence “linguistic actions,” they are not the sole determinants of the ways in which individuals will participate in communicative events (Hall, 2002: 34, 36). That is, their identities may predispose them to communicate in certain ways, but they are always able to “take up a unique stance” toward these identities by “using language in unexpected ways towards unexpected goals” (Hall, 2002: 36). All of this occurs through communication between social actors within various social assemblages who use language to identify with one another.

### **3.6 Summary and research questions**

This chapter has considered the concept of TESOL professional identity as it interacts with discourse and practise. I have conceptualised neoliberalism as a consistent narrative underlying globalisation and activities associated with it, such as teaching English to speakers of other languages. I have also considered political and economic issues that are of significance to TESOL professionalism, such as intercultural communication and commercialism. Finally, I have examined the role of communities of practising English teachers and their role in ‘socialising’ English language teachers – who are also agentive social actors.

The broad themes discussed above are of consequence in respect of their interaction with 'TESOL practitioners' professional identities. They can be seen to interrelate with one another and also with issues that are pertinent to the research context. For example, the theme of neoliberalism and its political consequences can be understood as relating to TESOL professionalism, its commercialisation and its socio-political consequences. These in turn are constituent to professional activity within communities of practising English language teachers wherein individual teachers decide how best to approach their own practise amid the different realities of their professional contexts. The globalising ethos of the research context can also be regarded as connecting with the broader theme of neoliberalism, and interactions between Western expatriate TESOL practitioners and UAE nationals likewise involve the cultural politics associated with both neoliberalism and the TESOL profession.

The major themes identified in this and the previous chapter - which can additionally be used as broad themes under which to organise the research data collected during the course of conducting this study - are professional and interpersonal conflict brought on by commercialisation and alienation from local society and resulting in detachment from TESOL practise in the local context. To elaborate, the theme of professional conflict involves the market driven commercialisation of TESOL and its collision with TESOL professionalism (discussed above in terms of TESOL professionalism), while that of interpersonal conflict stems from the perceived difficulty of applying 'Western' English language curricula with Emirati students in UAE higher education (discussed in terms of essentialised appraisals of UAE national students in the previous chapter). Further, the theme of alienation from local society can be connected with the transient nature of expatriate professionalism in the UAE (discussed in the previous chapter), essentialism in UAE higher education, and the cultural politics of TESOL (discussed

above in terms of TESOL professionalism). Likewise, the themes of commercialism and detachment in TESOL may be seen as both central components and consequences of TESOL's market oriented globalising ethos.

All of these matters can be regarded as fundamental to TESOL discourse and practise in the research context; they are significant themes through which to interpret research data and move toward understanding TESOL practitioner identities in the United Arab Emirates. The interaction between identity, discourse, and practise is an important matter in the present study and a phenomenon that the study seeks to explore through establishing links between the 'local world' of the individual participants and the 'global world' of TESOL, education, and the free market. My aim in conducting this study was to interrogate the perceptions of TESOL practitioners regarding their 'self-images' as educators; I wanted to know how they defined themselves as teachers and how this compared with interpretations of ESOL teacher identity in other/broader contexts. I was also interested in exploring their insights vis-à-vis their 'place' in UAE society, the roles that they saw themselves performing and how these interacted with their perceptions of themselves as educators.

In a broad sense, I wanted to develop an awareness of the connections between recent developments in UAE higher education and large-scale international change. I also wanted to examine the 'intercultural' issues in the research context within the larger worlds of TESOL and globalisation. In particular, I wanted to contextualise the struggles that local ESOL teachers faced in forming stable professional identities in the broader worlds of TESOL, internationalised higher education, and neoliberal globalisation. This study then, addresses the following research questions:

1. How do English faculty members working at an institution of higher learning in the United Arab Emirates define themselves as teachers?

and

2. How do they perceive their roles in the society of the United Arab Emirates?

The participants responded to these questions in interviews that I conducted with them in the United Arab Emirates in early 2011. In the next chapter, I will describe the research process; I will explain how I used interviews and summary-memos to collect interview data and why I decided that these were the most effective means through which to both access the individual subjectivities of the participants and identify common themes and subject positions in their accounts. I will also outline the ways in which I analysed and interpreted the views of these TESOL practitioners in the research context in order to answer the above research questions before reporting on the findings and discussing their broader implications in chapters five and six respectively.



## Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

### Introduction

This chapter aims to explain and justify the process of researching TESOL professional identities at an ‘internationalised’ public UAE institution of higher learning. In the previous chapter, I described the conceptualisations of TESOL practitioner identity that led to the formulation of the research questions listed above. To address these questions, it was necessary to engage directly with English language teachers in the research context and develop an understanding of their self-perceptions as educators. My aim here is to demonstrate and justify the methods I used to discover the self-perceptions of English teachers and contextualise these in the wider ‘worlds’ of international TESOL, higher education, and neoliberal globalisation.

I will begin by describing the research methodology and its theoretical underpinnings to rationalise the overall research design and establish its efficacy as a means of discovery and understanding. I will then explain and justify the research design itself, highlighting important data collection methods, ethical considerations, and analytical procedures. Finally, I will provide a brief description of the informants and explain their roles in the processes of data collection and analysis, which I will also outline chronologically before discussing the limitations of the research methodology.

### 4.1 Theoretical perspectives

The manner in which teachers understand themselves can be comprehended by examining the ways in which they respond to their professional contexts and how they comprehend the work that they do as educators (Tsui, 2003: 2). Answering the research questions and investigating teacher identity both necessitated asking teachers about their

experiences in the research context (Wright, 2006: 80) to elicit their “ideas, intentions, values, and beliefs” (Pring, 2004: 39). In essence, conducting the research involved looking for nuanced individual subjectivities, identifying similarities between them, and framing them in the research context. This was accomplished through interviewing the participants and confirming interpretations of their interviews through summary memos as well as processing data in summary charts to amalgamate and condense them and thereby identify common themes in discussions (see below for a detailed account of the data collection and analyses).

Methodologically, this study is located principally within the “critical paradigm” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007: 26) as it is concerned primarily with examinations of power relations in societies and ways in which asymmetries of power can function as identity determinants among those that they affect (Carspecken, 2008). It is also an interpretive study in the sense that it seeks to understand events from the perspectives of participants in a social situation and thereby access ‘reality’ as they experience it (Ernest, 1994). The study, however, is not concerned with the ‘mechanics’ of the social construction of reality or inventorying ways in which TESOL identities may be socially constructed. While I have great respect for the potential of individual human agency and its capacity to direct identity formation, I am more interested in unexamined subject positions relating to asymmetrical power relations that may be assumed by social actors – TESOL practitioners in this case – and potentially ‘absorbed’ as strands of their identities.

This research study is concerned more with meaning than measurement (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003) and focuses on human sense making as opposed to dependent and independent variables (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). I believe that individual feelings and perceptions are important and worthy of study, but their “immense complexity” amid the

“elusive and intangible quality” of human social interaction (Cohen et al., 2007: 10) should be explained in “human terms” and not reduced to empirical data through “quantification and measurement” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999: 123). The study then, is qualitative in its orientation and uses “nonnumerical” methods (Morrow & Smith, 2000: 200) of data collection and analysis (see below) associated with accessing human subjectivity (Wellington, 2000: 16). Thus the subjective nature of the enquiry belies any claim to scientific objectivity or identification of a single “hard, objective and tangible” truth (Cohen et al., 2007: 6). These considerations are significant because they help to justify the “chosen methodology” and associated qualitative research methods used to conduct this study (Dawson, 2009: 138).

In ontological terms, I understand ‘reality’ as multiple, changing, and indefinite; something that can theoretically be socially constructed by people in different situations (Pring, 2004, Crotty, 1998). In many ways, this study is ontologically “relativist,” because it comprehends ‘reality’ as ever changing and dependent upon context (Richards, 2003: 34). I also feel, however, that these social constructions of reality are heavily influenced by social, political, cultural, and economic values that have “histories” and may have come to be accepted as realities unto themselves (Scotland, 2012: 13). Again, this study is more concerned with examining these broader societal values in the discourse of individuals than it is with scrutinising the processes involved in the social construction of their realities (and identities).

I would argue that the social world is inconsistent and unpredictable and therefore cannot be explained in a simple way (Angen, 2000), though I also believe that social structures exist and potentially direct aspects of human identity formation. Accessing the nuanced subjectivities of individual social actors – even against a backdrop of particular global and societal continuities – is, I feel, an important part of developing

understandings of their identities as people and professionals.

In an epistemological sense then, I see knowledge as “personal, subjective, and unique” (Cohen et al., 2007: 255) and dependent on the perceptions of individuals (Richards, 2003). I am also of the opinion, however, that knowledge can be produced and reproduced by people (Myers, 2009) (including researchers) and may be used for particular purposes that serve particular interests (Troudi, 2011). ‘Knowledge’ then, may function to further specific “interests at work in particular situations” which can be investigated and “uncovered” through scholarly enquiry (Cohen et al., 2007: 26). Further, it can be imposed upon people in such a way as to effectively exploit or otherwise oppress them (Atkinson, 2002). Knowledge in this sense then, can also have “substantive-constitutive relations” with identities, social practises, institutions, and “power structures” (Carspecken, 2008: 170). That is, the knowledge of powerful interests and entities in societies may come to be universally counted as “worthwhile” (Cohen et al., 2007: 27) and thereby become the ‘common sense’ underpinning public discourse and policy enactments.

I believe that social environments can also develop “communication systems” that reproduce types of knowledge and sometimes unexamined “ideological positions” among their members (Scollon et al., 2012: 107), but these can also reflect ideologies that infuse discourse across a number of international contexts, professional and otherwise (Fairclough, 2010). I respect the reception and creation of both knowledge and ‘reality’ as dialectical and social processes. I would argue, however, that these are sometimes overshadowed by the “norms and practises of the powerful,” in which the knowledge and realities of powerful sectors of societies can become the final authority on how people should conduct themselves in practise (Troudi, 2011: 1).

I also agree with the notion that knowledge has an “emancipatory function,” however; issues of social justice and “marginalism” can be exposed through critical research and potentially aid in the “alteration” of reality through subsequent “human action” informed by emancipatory critical knowledge (Scotland, 2012: 13). While my research is to some extent interpretive in its philosophical orientation then, it is fundamentally critical in its theoretical alignment – particularly regarding the influence of social structures on knowledge and reality that guided the data analysis and interpretation.

## **4.2 Research design**

Below I have set out detailed descriptions of the instrument used to collect research data, the methods used to collect and analyse the data, and ethical considerations I observed while conducting this study. I will provide a detailed description of the interview style I used to collect the data during this study as well as my rationale for choosing this method of data collection. I will also give a comprehensive account of the different procedures I followed in analysing the data and presenting it according to themes identified in the analysis and in the conceptual framework. Finally, I will explain the various ways in which I ensured that the research was conducted in an ethically sound manner in order to protect the anonymity of the informants and make certain that they were comfortable participating in the study.

### **4.2.1 The research instrument: Semi-structured interview**

In collecting the research data, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with the participants to access their impressions of the institutional context and examine professional issues related to it. I wanted to discover the “thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings

and perspectives” of the interviewees (Wellington, 2000: 71), and needed to make decisions about which means of data collection would enable me to most effectively accomplish this. I considered methods such as questionnaire surveys, observations, and interviews to reveal the viewpoints of the informants, but ultimately decided that interviewing was the best way in which to obtain the type of information I needed. I did not choose to employ methods of observation or of questionnaire surveying because I did not think that these methods would be entirely appropriate given the nature of the study and its objectives.

To illustrate, I felt that using a questionnaire was not the best way to achieve my research aims because this type of survey would not allow participants the flexibility to fully express themselves – particularly in ways that I might not have anticipated when designing the survey and predetermining categories for analysis (Adams & Cox, 2008). I worried that the data I collected by way of a questionnaire might be unsophisticated or limited in scope (Cohen et al., 2007) because I would be unable to probe for additional information in particularly important areas to obtain a clearer impression of informant perspectives (Phellas, Bloch & Seale, 2012). Similarly, if the participants were unclear on the meaning of a questionnaire item, they would be unable to ask me for clarification (as they could during a face-to-face interview) and might not be able provide me with the information I required as a consequence (Burns, 2000).

I also felt that observations were less suited than interviews to uncovering the kind of information that I was hoping to find in conducting the study. I was trying to probe the “unobservable” experiences and perceptions of the informants in conducting the study and I felt that observation alone would not allow for a full discovery of these things (Wellington, 2000: 71). While conducting observations might have helped me to understand the ways in which the participants interacted within their

professional context, I did not believe that they would give me access to more subtle and nuanced elements of their subjectivities or their identities as professionals (that interviews would allow), which is what I ultimately hoped to understand through conducting the study (Rugg & Petre, 2007).

I wanted to use a method of data collection that was well suited to my research goals (O’Leary, 2004) and felt that interviewing would provide the best means of interrogating the “situated accounts” of the participants in the research setting (Lankshear & Knobel: 2009: 199). During our interviews, I hoped to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the informants’ experiences (McNamara, 1999) as well as insight into issues that they perceived to be important and relevant (Bryman, 2012). I anticipated learning more about how the interviewees understood their professional lives and assessed their own value as professionals through conducting the interviews (Gillham, 2000; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2006 in Takahashi, 2011). I expected that running interviews would “generate content” regarding the worldviews of the informants from an insider’s perspective and thereby access the manner in which they constructed and represented their identities through the words that they used (Brinkman, 2008: 472; Lankshear & Knobel, 2009: 198, 199).

The interview format was “semi-structured” (Appendix 1 contains the interview schedule) - midway between a conversation and a questionnaire on the “survey continuum” (Gillham, 2000: 6 and Table 2: Singh & Doherty, 2004 propose a similar continuum). The “interview guide” (or protocol) for the interviews was predetermined (see interview schedule), but allowed for the addition of “probes” or follow-up questions to elicit clarification or further discussion of particularly remarkable subjects (Ayres, 2008: 810). This type of interview is a “key technique in ‘real-world’ research” (Gillham, 2000: 21) because it encourages interviewees to speak “freely” (Troudi & Alwan, 2010: 112) and provides the interviews with the

requisite scope to allow interviewees to “expound the full significance of their actions” (Pring, 2004: 39). It is also structured enough, however, to allow for the discovery of specific information, which can be “compared and contrasted” with that derived from other interviews (Dawson, 2009: 28).

**Table 2**

*The verbal data dimension* (Gillham, 2000: 6)

	← Unstructured → Structured →					
<b>Listening to other people's conversation; a kind of verbal observation</b>	Using 'natural' conversation to ask research questions	'Open-ended' interviews; just a few key open questions, e.g. 'elite interviewing'	Semi-structured interviews, i.e. open and closed questions	Recording schedules: in effect, verbally administered questionnaires	Semi-structured questionnaires: multiple choice and open questions	Structured questionnaires: simple, specific, closed questions

It was for this reason that I decided to use a semi-structured interview format as opposed to an unstructured interview style. I wanted to discover how informants in the research context perceived themselves as professionals and as members of UAE society. In order to do this, I needed to gain deep insights into their individual understandings, but I also needed to make comparisons between them regarding ways in which they identified themselves as professionals. Unstructured interviews might not have uncovered information that would have permitted this kind of comparison across informants as the questions asked and topics raised would likely have varied from discussion to discussion (Richards, 2003). In order to ensure that I had sufficient grounds to make valid and reasonable comparisons, I had to ask interviewees the same questions and maintain this structure to ensure that they were commenting on the same issues (Richards, 2003).

I decided to interview the participants individually - as opposed to conducting group interviews or focus group discussions - to eliminate the possibility of 'groupthink.' This ensured that the interviewees would provide individual responses that reflected their own views rather than a “collective group response” that could obscure individual differences or a “range of



[possible] responses” (Cohen et al., 2007: 374). This also allowed the participants to maintain their anonymity as research subjects, which I felt would facilitate ‘freer’ discussion, as they would not fear “being ostracised” or otherwise “marginalised” for expressing views that differed from those of their peers (Cohen et al., 2007: 374). I asked the interviewees to decide where they would like to conduct the interviews; I thought that it would be best for them to choose a location in which they would feel most comfortable discussing the professional issues that we explored in our discussions (Herzog, 2012: 209). I felt that the responses I received from participants in private, one-to-one interviews would be more honest and would, therefore, more accurately reflect the truth as the participants experienced it.

#### **4.3 Conducting the study**

This study utilises interview data collected in the spring of 2011 from the participants, who were working as English language teachers at a UAE institution of higher learning. Below, I will discuss the process of collecting the research data through interviews conducted with the participants in the study. I will begin by providing a brief description of the interviewees who took part in the study after which I will outline the actual processes of piloting the interviews, conducting and recording the finalised interviews, and analysing the collected interview data (Table 3 shows a chronology of the processes of data collection and analysis). Finally, I will discuss limitations in the methodology of the study to end the chapter.

Table 3  
*Chronology of data collection and analysis*

Event	Date
1. Pilot interviews conducted	March 2011
2. First round of interviews conducted	March 2011
3. Summaries and memoranda written	March 2011
4. Further analyses of interview data	April 2011
5. Pilot interviews conducted	May 2011
6. Second round of interviews conducted	May 2011
7. Summaries and memoranda written	May/June 2011
8. Further analyses of interview data	June – Aug 2011

### 4.3.1 The participants

Eight English language teachers working at a tertiary-level educational institution in the United Arab Emirates participated in this study – six of them male and two female. All of the participants came from The UK, The USA, and Canada, except for one, (John) who was from Western Europe. They were “native” (or in the case of John, near-native) speakers of English and members of “Western” (Anglo-European) ethnic groups. Additionally, four of the participants held graduate degrees at the master’s level, and five held official certifications in English language teaching. The participants were at different stages in their careers, but were all between ‘mid’ and late career in terms of their ages and professional experience (Table 4 summarises the experience, qualifications and national origins of the participants).

Table 4  
*The participants*

Participant	Country/region of origin	TESOL Experience	Qualifications
Ben	England	26 years	CELTA, DELTA
David	England	18 years	BEd, CELTA, DELTA
James	England	28 years	Diploma TEFL, MA
Janet	England	21 years	PGCE
Jeff	United States	12 years	CELTA, MA
John	Western Europe	12 years	MA
Mark	Canada	20 years	CELTA, DELTA
Sarah	United States	18 years	MA

The informants were employees and faculty members at the same institution of higher learning where they worked together as English language teachers. They were involved in language teaching at the ‘foundations’ level – preparing students for university study by helping them to develop their English language communication skills. The interviewees were colleagues and co-workers of mine, and all had the same status as employees (faculty). They had been recruited from locations overseas and all of them had had a minimum of five years’ experience in English language teaching (in ‘non-Western’ contexts) prior to their arrival in the United Arab Emirates, where they had each been working for a minimum of two years.

In selecting the interviewees as participants, I drew upon personal contacts and links (within the institution) whom I felt could provide “quality information” (Wellington, 2000: 59). As is often the case in studies such as this one, there was an element of convenience in the selection of the research sample (Shank & Brown, 2007: 209). This is a type of non-probability, convenience sampling - also known as “accidental opportunity sampling,” (Cohen, et al., 2011: 155) – as it entails a “process of using as the sample whoever happens to be available at the time” (Gay et al., 2006: 112). This type of sampling involves selecting the nearest individuals to participate in a research study, and is acceptable provided the researcher “takes pains” (as I do here) to report that the “parameters of generalisability” in a study of this type are negligible (Cohen et al., 2011: 156). The experiences of the TESOL practitioners who took part in this study then, may not be generalised to a larger population as the participants cannot legitimately be regarded as representative of any broader group of individuals (Gay et al. 2006).

I did not feel that it was either feasible or appropriate to employ random sampling when selecting participants for the study as I believed that practical considerations would not allow it and conceptual precepts did not

require it (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009: 342). As an alternative to random sampling, I selected a purposeful sample - looking for typical and “information-rich cases” that could be studied in depth (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009: 342) through key informants, who were representative and comfortable participating in a research study (and developing my understanding of the “phenomenon” under investigation) (Gay et al., 2006: 113). Thus I employed a kind of judgment (Gay et al., 2006: 113) or criterion-based sampling (Burns, 2000: 465) with information-rich informants (Punch, 1998: 193, McMillan & Wergin, 2002) that I had “hand-picked” to participate based upon my assessments of their “typicality” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004: 148, Cohen et al., 2011: 156).

I selected participants, for example, whom I felt to be ‘balanced’ – neither entirely ‘positive’ nor overly ‘negative’ with regard to their general outlook, as I perceived it. The weakness in this type of sampling is the “potential for inaccuracy in the researcher’s criteria” for selecting the sample; it is based on personal judgment and is therefore, entirely subjective (Gay et al., 2006: 113). Convenience samples as well, contain “unknown types and degrees of bias” and so are also “unrepresentative of a broader population” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004: 148). My judgements of the participants’ suitability then, were founded entirely upon subjective considerations, which meant that the informants were not necessarily the ‘best’ or ‘most representative’ research subjects for the study.

In addition to selecting participants for practical reasons however, there were political considerations in the research context that I felt necessitated purposive sampling and affected my choice of respondents. According to Cohen (et al., 2011), all educational research is sensitive (165), in that it requires varying degrees of sensitivity toward “the context, the cultures [involved in the study, presumably], the participants, [and] the consequences of the research on a range of parties” (165) on the part of the

researcher, depending on the context in which the research is conducted. In the case of this study, being a participant constituted a potential threat to the interviewees, who risked incurring negative social consequences as an outcome of taking part in the study and forthrightly expressing their opinions of the local context.

It is true that academics in the GCC region tend to self-censor and are circumspect in their assessments of local politics (Wildavsky, 2010). Participants in research studies are equally guarded, as being openly critical of the ruling elite (and its institutions, presumably) can attract unwanted attention and result in political censure (Shaw, 1997) in a society where “open speech” is “criminalized” in some circumstances (Ross, 2011: 1). Thus conducting a study in this type of context is a potentially hazardous endeavour, where extracted data may reveal politically dangerous attitudes or other types of sensitive information.

This might constitute what Cohen et al. (2011) term “guilty knowledge,” where the reports of the researcher’s colleagues threaten all parties involved in the study (166). Although this study does not reveal (nor did it uncover) embarrassing secrets about the lives of the participants or the people with whom they work, it does show attitudes expressed by the interviewees that are not wholly supportive of the institution for which they work (and by extension, the government that funds their professional activities).

This is a problem in totalitarian regimes and “closed societies,” (such as the United Arab Emirates) where officially sanctioned educational research tends to be apolitical and methodological issues become “political/micro-political minefields” (Cohen et al., 2011: 166). In such contexts, the very act of conducting educational research is a sensitive matter in and of itself (Cohen et al., 2011: 166). While conducting this study then, I selected participants whom I felt were not ‘extreme’ in their attitudes,

partly for reasons of ‘typicality’ and also to avoid generating controversy by revealing blatantly and exclusively negative sentiments toward the local professional context. The selection of participants also involved making judgments about trust and confidentiality; I chose teachers who were known to me, and whom I felt I could trust as interviewees.

### 4.3.2 Data collection and analysis

In the course of carrying out this study, I collected, processed, and evaluated the interview data, presenting it in the form of a narrative to represent and highlight the major findings of the investigation. In order to develop this final presentation, I conducted a series of analytical procedures which included summarising and coding the data, reorganising and analysing the coded data, and finally writing up a narrative account of the findings, the process of conducting the research, and reflections on the broader implications of the findings. All of this facilitated a kind of transformation of the raw data to its current processed form (Wolcott, 1994). I will detail the salient features of this development more precisely below, to explain how the recorded interview data was eventually converted into the final account of the study.

#### 4.3.2.1 Interviewing

After completing the background reading that informed the early stages of the study, I was able to formulate my research questions and from these design an interview schedule for pilot interviews that I conducted with the participants (Appendix 2 contains the interview schedule for the pilot interviews). I grouped the questions under headings and prioritised those which I felt were of the greatest importance (as recommended by Gillham, 2000). I then “trialed” the questions (before piloting the interview) by

having a colleague read them and suggest possible changes to questions (Gillham, 2000: 21).

I made these changes and conducted two pilot interviews in order to uncover “defects” in the interview protocol and “prune” the interview questions to dispense with overlapping questions and topics (Gillham, 2000: 54). This helped to shorten the interview schedule and sequence the questions in a more logical way for the remaining interviews in the ‘first round’ of data collection (Appendix 3 contains the second draft of the first interview schedule).

I conducted a series of eight interviews during the first round of discussions, which I recorded for purposes of data analysis (the recorded interviews have been saved on a data compact disc, which is attached to the inside back cover of this report document) - verifying beforehand that all of the interviewees were comfortable with this arrangement. After analysing the collected and summarised research data (through processes which I will describe below), I identified issues that had emerged during the interviews which I thought were particularly important and needed further discussion (Troudi & Alwan, 2010). I focused on areas that I felt had not received sufficient attention during the first series of interviews, and new topics that had arisen during those discussions. I used these to draft the interview protocol for the second sequence of interviews (Appendix 4 contains this interview protocol). I then finished the second series of interviews employing the same processes of data collection and analysis outlined below.

Once I had assembled the interview data, I began to process it to make sense of what I had collected and observe areas of significance within it. I described, analysed, and interpreted the data, ultimately transforming it into an authoritative written account (Wolcott, 1994). Description, analysis and interpretation in this study were not discrete and mutually exclusive

sequential processes; they were instead elements of what is sometimes generally glossed as data analysis, and there was considerable overlap between them (Wolcott, 1994). In fact, these aspects of the analysis tended to combine in the final narrative and the relationship between them was dialectic as the narrative took shape (Wolcott, 2009).

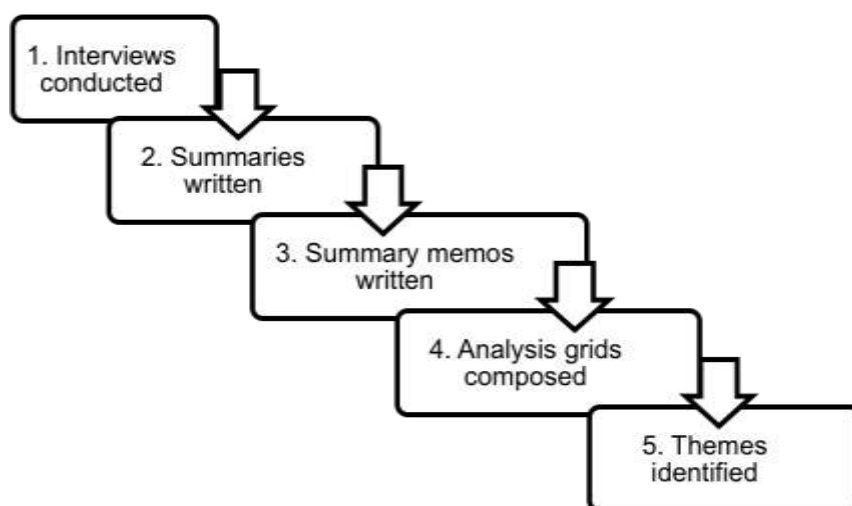
#### 4.3.2.2 Summarising the data

The analysis of the data was sometimes “enigmatic and daunting” as a series of complex iterative processes (van den Hoonaard & van den Hoonaard, 2008: 186) and I tried to avoid “haphazard subjectivity” (Miller, 2008: 753) by establishing consistency and trustworthiness in the analysis and the findings of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 245). I did this by keeping detailed records of analysis documents (and the documents themselves) to create an audit trail, and technically validate the research data (Punch, 1998; Gillham, 2000). Analysis documents used in this study included summaries and memos that highlighted the main themes, or meaning units, that arose during the interviews and were drafted following each interview using interview recordings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). After each discussion, I wrote summaries (of approximately 3000 words each) of the conversation with the informant in which I described his or her expressed thoughts and identified key factors, issues, and concepts as well as matters for subsequent investigation (Cohen et al., 2000). This process involved some analysis and interpretation, but focused more on description to summarise the interview content efficiently.

I organised these summaries according to themes that I had identified by way of the iterative coding processes outlined below (see page 98) (Appendix 5 contains a sample of an interview summary). As the summaries were thorough, lengthy and comprehensive, I felt confident that the analyses had (to that point) reached a point of saturation (vis-à-vis the



themes I had identified within the data from the individual interviews) (Creswell, 2012) and no further interpretations were possible before drafting memos to the interviewees to confirm these analyses (Figure 1 summarises the processes of data collection and analysis involved in conducting the study).



**Figure 1. Process of data collection and analysis.**

#### 4.3.2.3 Member-checking

In order to construct meaningful analyses of the interview content, it was necessary to make judgments about the relationship between “manifest content” and “latent meaning” (what the participants meant by what they said) (Gillham, 2000: 69). This was difficult to do, as the quantity and “rich chaos” of the collected data was potentially overwhelming as numerous interpretations and analyses were possible (Rugg & Petre, 2007: 152). It was also complicated by the idea that meaning is relative and open to interpretive freedom as it can vary across contexts, among groups, and within instances of speech (Vannini, 2008).

In order to address these issues and strengthen the analysis, I had the informants – as those immediately involved in the study - evaluate my

interpretations of the interviews and included this within the purview of the research (Wolcott, 1994). I wrote memos in which I re-summarised the main points raised during the interviews and what I felt to be their positions regarding them (Appendix 6 contains a sample summary-memo that was sent to a participant in the study, also see section 4.2.2). The memos were abridgments of the preliminary interview summaries and were sent to the participants to verify my initial impressions of their interviews. In each of the memoranda I wrote, I invited participants to comment on the memo/summaries of their interviews with respect to their accuracy.

In all cases, the interviewees agreed with my synopses, though in some instances they added comments for clarification and refinement (Appendix 7 contains a copy of an annotated summary returned by a participant). I also allowed the interviewees to keep copies of the summary-memos for their own records. Taking account of interviewee reactions to the analysis of their interviews was important because their agreement with the evaluation was an indication that the research analysis was effective and reflective of the truth (as the participants saw and expressed it) (Fairclough, 1992). This official member-checking procedure (Troudi & Alwan, 2010: 112) was useful because it helped to verify the assessments of interviewee responses and guided subsequent data analyses, which were predicated on the assumption that the initial interview analyses were correct. Again, this was largely an exercise in description, though analysis and interpretation were also involved in the process of writing the summary memos that were verified by the participants.

#### **4.3.2.4 Coding**

Analysing the interview data and transforming it into a narrative involved the recognition of patterns in the data and the exploration of relationships between broad data categorisations (Wolcott, 1994). In order

to reduce the collected interview data to a manageable and more readily comprehensible form, it was coded, which involved categorising the responses of participants thematically for purposes of analysis (Gay et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2007). This process included the development of conceptual categories (Burns, 2000) through the identification of broad patterns within the collected interviewee responses (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004: 266). The process of coding the data according to theme was an intuitive (Burns, 2000) “reflexive, reactive interaction” between the data and myself (as is common in qualitative interview analyses) (Cohen et al., 2007: 368).

In coding the interview data, I considered the purpose of the study, my own knowledge of the problem under investigation and, most importantly, the expressions of the participants (Burns, 2000). My systematic identification of significant features in the data then, was informed by theory (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004), influenced by the research problem, and based upon informant perceptions (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). I tried to ensure that the early categorisation of data was congruent with the research purpose (Burns, 2000), but ultimately I wanted to use informant perceptions regarding the phenomenon under study as a general code (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009), subsuming all other codes in a “hierarchy of subsumption” (Cohen et al., 2007: 478).

To begin then, I identified setting or context codes that emerged from the data (such as perspectives on local education, society, and students) based upon participants’ observed perceptions (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Initially, these codes were ascribed to the data according to (responses to questions on) the interview schedule, but more specific categories were subsequently identified from within the data itself. I searched through my interview recordings, (and subsequently lists of quotations) for example, looking for patterns of thinking, expressed in

words and phrases that appeared with regularity and appeared to be noteworthy (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

The idea that teachers should be facilitators, for instance, came up in every discussion with informants about their self-perceived roles as educators. Thus ‘facilitator’ became one of many subordinate codes to the superordinate code of ‘perceptions of self / identity as a teacher’ identified in initial analyses (Cohen et al., 2007). The process of identifying codes subordinate to the initial, broader context codes was repeated through the employment of the analysis procedures outlined below. Coding the interviews helped me to get a sense of what I had in the data (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009), though it was a laborious, involved, and time-consuming process of analysis informed and guided by my earlier descriptions of the interview content.

#### 4.3.2.5 Analysis grids

The analysis also involved highlighting my findings through summarising the main patterns I had observed in summary charts (Wolcott, 1994). I composed “analysis grids” (see Gillham, 2000: 64), in which I briefly summarised the opinions of the participants in point form under thematic headings (established through the coding process outlined directly above) for purposes of “meaning condensation” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 205) (Appendix 8 contains a sample of an analysis grid). I then designed a single summary chart that was organised according to interview topics, under which all of the interviewees’ opinions and attitudes were summarised (Appendix 9 contains an excerpt from the topic summary chart that I conducted after the first round of interviews).

I condensed this list of data again, merging the information collected from each of the interviewees, to convey their opinions relating to the general topics and themes raised in the discussions and provide a summary

of the findings generated by the interviews and their analysis (Appendix 10 contains an excerpt from the topic analysis summary chart that I constructed after the first round of interviews). I tried to avoid “biased subjectivity” by including anomalies and outliers in the data and indicating points at which the participants had not been in agreement, and not adhering to a particular agenda (by including only data which supported that agenda) (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 213).

Perhaps the most important aspect of the analysis and interpretation of the research data was recontextualising the statements of the interviewees, and attempting to place them within broader frames of reference (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I studied the general topic analysis summary charts from both rounds of interviews (see Appendix 10) and identified themes by condensing the information into what I felt were the main, and most significant and frequently discussed ideas in the interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). These were commonly held ideas that were repeated and often cut across the themes identified in earlier analyses and coding (ideas relating to conflict and commercialisation for example, were repeated in different ways and in response to different questions). They surfaced at different points in the interviews and were not necessarily connected specifically to particular items on the interview schedule. They were also resonant in some ways with the broader themes identified in chapter three (see chapter five as well).

I organised these ideas in a table where I listed the main themes that had emerged from the data analyses and also outlined the main topics and ideas associated with these themes (Appendix 11 contains this interview theme table). These themes were later reorganised and presented as sub-themes of the ‘main’ themes identified in chapters 2 and 3 when the findings of the study were written up and set out in chapter 5. Thus the positions of the informants who assisted me in conducting the study were

recontextualised in the broader frames of UAE society, global TESOL and the free market. As in many research studies of this type, the ideas that formed the body of the thematic discussion were identified inductively from the empirical data, while the ‘main’ categories under which these ideas were organised were determined a priori – from “prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study” (see chapter three – the conceptual framework) (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 88).

After identifying the “key substantive points” (Gillham, 2000: 59) raised in the interviews and categorising them, I compiled and categorised an extensive list of quotes from each of the recorded interviews with participants, which demonstrated the range and character of their responses (Gillham, 2000) (appendix 12 contains an excerpt from this list as an example of how quotes were compiled). These were segments of the participants’ accounts that I wanted to incorporate in the final report so that the informants could speak for themselves (Wolcott, 1994). I did not report every word spoken by the informants, however; instead, I tried to “zoom in” on specific features of the data that were “consonant with the purposes of the study” (Wolcott, 1994: 16).

#### 4.3.2.6 Writing up the findings

This process of transforming and writing up the account involved following an analytical framework – directed initially by the research questions, interview schedule, and preliminary context codes - to impose a structure on the account while remaining open to including data that did not fit within this initial framework (Wolcott, 1994). I wrote up the findings in the form of a narrative, which was interpolated with quotes to illustrate the main points of the discussion (Gillham, 2000: 74) and attempt to establish the “isomorphism” of the findings with “reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 114). In this final report of the findings, I focused on what I had made of

the data analyses, again undertaking to generate insightful commentary and avoid unwarranted personal opinion (Wolcott, 1994). As with other aspects of the data transformation process, the formation of the narrative involved description, analysis, and interpretation of the interview data that undergirded the study (Wolcott, 1994).

The final narrative account of the findings included details about conducting the study itself (set out in this section), outlining the specific fieldwork procedures I had followed in collecting the data as a narrative technique to provide an inventory of the practical measures involved in conducting the research (Wolcott, 1994). I tried to personalise these, reflecting on how the research process had affected me and what I had learned in conducting the study (see section 6.7.1) (Wolcott, 1994). The account also delineated the implications of the findings, giving a sense of “what pieces of the puzzle [were] still missing,” by identifying limitations in the study and indicating how alternate narratives derived from other members of the institution would facilitate a more thorough analysis and interpretation of the research context (see 6.7.3) (Wolcott, 1994: 44). Finally, I took pains to disclose potential flaws in the study and provide a more complete picture of the analysis (see 6.7.4) (Wolcott, 1994).

I did what I could to avoid either over or under interpreting what I had discovered, trying not to go (too far) beyond the data, and link interpretations directly to it (Wolcott, 1994). I also turned to theory and attempted to link the study’s findings to larger issues (Wolcott, 1994) associated, in this case, with discourse, power, and neoliberalism (among others). In doing this, I wanted to refine my “conceptual apparatus” by examining the findings through the lens of the theoretical framework, but going beyond that to develop the framework (the notion of ‘conferred identity’ for example, is explored in chapter 6) (Wolcott, 1994: 43). Overall, I tried to “challenge conventional wisdom” and “set a new course”

(Wolcott, 1994: 45) with my interpretations of the research data, questioning what seemed like common sense and recommending possibilities for this sort of interrogation as an element of professional practice in the research context and beyond.

#### 4.4 Ethical considerations

One of the most important considerations in conducting this study (as with all research studies) is that it was conducted ethically - with respect for human rights - as an aspect of maintaining high standards and ‘quality’ in the process of conducting the research (Shank & Brown, 2007, Wellington, 2007). Through all of the stages of enquiry, I made sure that my work was ethically sound – from research design and methods, through analysis and the presentation of findings as outlined above (Wellington, 2000).

Often the concept of ethics is related to the treatment of the participants in research studies and the dilemma faced by researchers between uncovering information and protecting the rights of participants (Gorard, 2001). Research participants must be protected from physical, psychological or social harm by the researcher (Shank & Brown, 2007). For example, they must remain anonymous and have their anonymity guaranteed by the researcher, as well as being fully aware of what is happening to them at all times (i.e. they must give informed consent in order to participate in the study).

This study conformed to the ethical standards established by the University of Exeter at all stages of the research process. I completed a “certificate of ethical research approval” form (Appendix 13 contains a copy of this form) before I began the process of data collection in March 2011. This document provided a brief summary of my research aims as well as a description of the participants and how I would collect information from them. In signing the certificate, I agreed to protect the anonymity of each



participant, also ensuring that he or she had given informed consent to participating in this research study.

In order to guarantee that these requirements were fulfilled, I asked the participants in the study to sign a consent form (Appendix 14 contains a copy of this form), which I allowed them to keep (I also kept a copy of each signed form). I made clear to them the exact nature of the research study in which they were agreeing to participate, focusing specifically on the aims and purposes of the study. I informed the participants that they were not compelled to participate in the study in any way and there would not be any negative consequence associated with their refusal to contribute to the project. Further, I made sure that the informants knew they could withdraw from participation in the study at any time and refuse permission to publish information they had provided should they wish to do so.

I gave each of the participants a pseudonym to protect their anonymity and asked them not to reveal information that might compromise this – including their names, the names of their colleagues and co-workers and the name or location of their employer. As mentioned above, I obtained their permission to record the interview sessions and made sure that they were aware that they could refuse to answer any questions with which they did not feel comfortable. I also ensured that every interviewee received copies of the summary memos I prepared for them following each of their interviews.

It was very important to me then, to protect the rights of the participants by maintaining their anonymity and protecting their privacy regarding their involvement in the study. I also hoped, however, that participants would be equally discreet about disclosing their participation in the study, thereby maintaining a level of privacy for me as a researcher. I understand that this type of overtly purposive sampling means that any claims to generalisability on my part are invalid, but I feel that the desire to

generalise the findings of the study was secondary to the need to learn more about the experiences and professional identities of the individuals who took part in this study. As well, it was important to me to use informants with whom I had a mutual level of trust to help the study to progress in a way that did not threaten the social standing of either the participants or myself.

I wanted the participants to feel that they could speak candidly, and I did not want them to feel that they might be at risk of losing their jobs for revealing particular attitudes toward their experiences in the United Arab Emirates. For these reasons, I chose not to involve the educational institution for which the interviewees worked in this research study. I conducted the interviews outside the grounds of the institution and I asked interviewees not to reveal information that would identify the institution or distinguish it from other tertiary level educational organisations in the UAE.

My relationship to the participants was that of a colleague and co-worker. My status at the institution was equal to that of the interviewees – that is, I was not a manager or other ‘authority figure’ and the interviewees would not have felt that they were obliged to participate in the study when I asked them to do so. The interviewees were people with whom I had worked for a minimum of two years, and I knew them personally. I saw this as a benefit to the study because it was easier for me to develop a rapport with them as interviewees and research subjects than it would have been with ‘strangers’ who might not have ‘opened up’ to the degree that the informants in this study did.

Overall, I have endeavoured to report the findings of the study as clearly as possible, maintain objectivity, protect the anonymity of the informants, treat all information that they provided as strictly confidential, and ensure that their participation was documented and reported truthfully and accurately.

## 4.5 Limitations of the methodology

According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), all forms of reporting, writing, and representation are “loaded” with the interests and intentions of the researcher/writer and none of them are “innocent” (282); the subjective aspects of research data interpretation prevent value-free observations of the social world (Howe: 1988). As well, the perceptions of the participants regarding their roles as educators and migrant workers in the UAE - their professional identities – were self-constructed, personal and subjective. These identities were also potentially unstable and variable; susceptible to rapid change and transformation. It would be unrealistic then, to assert that this study was immune to these human biases, just as the denial of subjectivity would indicate a lack of reflexivity and therefore of trustworthiness on my part (Somekh, 2008: 6). The analysis of conversations as well, can be difficult because language is naturally ambiguous, and the analytical process requires the interpreter to make independent inferences regarding meaning (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 5).

Interviewees also, may not give “the whole picture” through what they say in interviews, and researchers need to take this into account when reporting their research findings (Gillham, 2000: 94). It is also possible that “socially situated identities” will be “mutually co-constructed” in interviews (Gee, 1999: 121) and interviewers should be mindful of this when conducting interviews. The interviewees in this study, for example, are my colleagues and - while it could also be advantageous in terms of developing an interviewer-interviewee rapport - this might give rise to “reactivity,” where participants are motivated to answer interview questions in one way or another based upon the “presence or style” of the interviewer (Punch, 1998: 258). I tried to protect my interpretations of the research data from bias by following the methodological procedures outlined above, but it is important to acknowledge that these approaches are not infallible and

elements of subjectivity will likely have entered the research process at some points.

The method of deliberately selecting the participants for this study based upon assessments of their typicality and suitability as interviewees (outlined above - see 4.3.1) also represents a potential limitation of the methodology, or at least a “trade-off,” as it may have lent extra depth to the study, while decreasing its breadth relative to studies that employed probability sampling (Cohen et al., 2011: 156). This kind of purposive sampling limits the generalisability of the study (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) as there is no validity in “generalising the account” when non-probability sampling has been employed to assemble a group of participants (Burns, 2000: 465). Thus the findings of this study cannot rightfully be translated to other groups (of TESOL practitioners) in other settings (Punch, 1998: 105).

The participants in this study would have been more ‘representative’ of TESOL practitioners working in international contexts had they been randomly selected. As with many qualitative investigations, however, this study considers representativeness to be “secondary to the participants’ ability to provide the desired information about self and setting” (Gay et al., 2006: 114). The study, as well, does not make any claims to generalisability; it is not experimental research that absolutely requires random sampling of participants to meet validity criteria. Additionally, the provision of adequate “thick description” pertaining to the research events and reporting of data collection may actually help to establish “appropriate findings” that can be applied to other contexts (Spielman & Radnofsky, 2001: 265). As well, I feel that the experiences of the interviewees, as related in their interviews, connect in some respects to broad themes I have discussed in the conceptual framework of this study (see chapter 3) particularly in terms of the changing conditions in education generally and the effect that this has

had on the employment terms and pedagogy of English language teachers internationally.

## 4.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the theories undergirding the interpretive design of this study in order to rationalise the data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and analytical techniques associated with its application. I have described the informants who participated in the study and the processes by which I collected research data through interactions with them. Finally, I have discussed the limitations of the methodology as a means of discovering the ‘truth’ in the constantly evolving and unstable social world. Again, my aim in writing this chapter was to demonstrate the manner in which I collected and analysed the research data in order to explore them in the following chapter according to the broad themes identified in chapters two and three and the sub themes that emerged from the analyses. In chapter five then, I will relate the findings of the study under themes and sub themes of English language teacher identity in a UAE context, before contextualising these in the broader regions of TESOL, education, and globalisation in the final chapter.

## Chapter 5: TESOL practitioner identities - Research findings

### Introduction

The analyses of the interviews (see chapter 4) revealed a number of ideas that were commonly expressed and organised into sub themes that I felt connected with broader themes identified in the conceptual framework (see chapter 3) and relevant issues in the research context (see chapter 2). The themes that emerged from the literature review included conflict, alienation, commercialisation, and detachment as composite elements of UAE Western expatriate TESOL professional identities (Table 3 provides a summary of these). This chapter aims to describe themes that emerged from the data analyses as they interact with ‘broader’ themes identified in the conceptual framework (see chapter 3). More specifically, it explores substantive aspects of TESOL professionalism uncovered during discussions with the participants (and subsequent analyses of those discussions) that connect with those identified in the theoretical framework as pertinent to English language teacher identities in a broader sense.

In summarising the findings of the research, I will first examine the theme of conflict in the accounts of TESOL professional practise in the research context, as these were particularly prominent in both the research data and in conceptualisations of TESOL professionalism in the literature. I will consider perceived conflicts between institutional management and notions of professional practise as well as tensions created by the assumption of conflicting roles on the part of TESOL practitioners. I will also discuss the various ways in which conflicts arise during teacher-student interactions and how these are seen to complicate the professional duties of Western English language teachers practising in the research context.

I will link this theme to that of alienation from local society and ways in which separation and estrangement characterise accounts of intercultural

communication in the local context. I will also describe the ways in which this is expressed in assessments of local culture and the difficulties in realising institutional objectives as consequences of local cultural norms. I will then connect these evaluations to the theme of commercialisation in higher education and TESOL, exploring ways in which various collectively held perspectives – such as the link between education and entrepreneurialism and the inevitability of privatisation – reveal discourses of commercialisation as components of local TESOL professional identity construction.

**Table 3**  
*Themes and sub-themes identified in interview analyses*

Main theme	Source	Sub themes
<b>1. Professional conflict</b>	Commercial and educational imperatives in TESOL practise (identified in Chapter 3: 3.3.2)	Managerialism and autonomy, Accountability and education, Constant change and professionalism, Conflicted pedagogies
<b>2. Inter-personal conflict</b>	Notion of “pathologies” in UAE society and the conflict between competition and collectivism (chapter 2: 2.1.3)	Teachers and students, Curriculum and reality, Student resistance to education, Lack of critical thought among students and the demands of curriculum, Control and freedom, Social contracts and personal responsibility, Ostensible and real purposes of education
<b>3. Alienation from local society</b>	Perception of ‘separation’ between expatriate workforce and UAE nationals (chapter 2: 2.2.2) Also TESOL and ‘Othering’ (chapter 3: 3.3.4)	Separation and estrangement from local culture, Avoidance of and exclusion from local society, Cultural traits of UAE nationals, The ‘essence’ of ‘Emirati culture’
<b>4. Commercial discourse</b>	Commercial orientation of UAE higher education and TESOL (chapter 2: 2.3.2)	Education for employability, Education for modernisation, TESOL and the global market, Privatisation
<b>5. Detachment</b>	Communities of consumption, detachment, and marginalisation of TESOL practitioners (chapter 3: 3.4.5)	Detachment from globalisation, Detachment from the politics of TESOL, Lack of commitment, Resistance/agency

Finally, I will discuss the theme of detachment as an aspect of language teacher identity and a prominent theme in TESOL-related literature. I will describe ways in which English language teachers in the research context downplay the political significance of TESOL practise and similarly discount the importance of that practise to UAE society. I will also explore the sub themes of rejection (of the local context) and resistance as they emerged from the accounts of the informants, as coping strategies, aspects of detachment, and components of their professional identities. To illustrate my points, I will quote the interviewees who participated in the study. Following each quote, I will indicate the name of the interviewee being quoted, the round of interviews from which the quote is taken (“I1” for the first round or “I2” for the second), and the approximate time on the interview recording from which the quote has been extracted (so “Ben, I1: 24:30” signifies a quote extracted from Ben’s first interview at approximately 24 minutes and 30 seconds into the interview recording).

## 5.1 Conflicted professional selves

One of the main themes that emerged both from the data and from “prior theoretical understandings” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 88) of TESOL practitioner identity was that of conflict – particularly conflict between the professional imperatives of being an educator and performing roles associated with the administration of the institution. Aside from teaching classes, preparing lessons, and assessing student work, there were a variety of managerial directives that reportedly complicated the roles of teachers by diverting their energies from teaching. Within the classroom as well, the curriculum and numerous aspects of pedagogy had apparently been predetermined by a central authority, which made it more difficult for educators to make professional decisions independently.



### 5.1.1 Managerialism and autonomy

A lack of flexibility on the part of management compounded this problem – the organisational administration was perceived as “top down” and “prescriptive,” and educators were “told what to teach and how to teach it and when to teach it” (Ben, I1: 24:30). The university was “over managed” and “bureaucratic” (Mark: 41:10, James, I1: 18:00); its managers were “overbearing” (Jeff, I1: 21:10) - “ticking boxes” (James, I1: 18:05) to implement industrial “quality controls” at the institution (John, I1: 27:00). Generally, teachers were expected to be ‘flexible’ and ‘adaptable,’ but the institution was not prepared to reciprocate in this regard, obliging them to work “crippling” “factory hours” (James, I1: 52:00), expecting them to “drop everything” in order to complete emergency extra-curricular projects (David, I1: 36:50), document and “rationalise” everything that they did (Janet, I1: 21:00), and strictly adhere to the objectives of a curriculum that was “inflexible” (David, I1: 37:00).

This was regarded as a barrier to successful professional practise because it limited the choices that educators could make by restricting their autonomy in the workplace:

Is this organisation using all that I have to offer? Or, should I say, can afford for me to offer...I would say no. I can do certain things at certain times and in certain respects, but I don't think I'm being allowed to be doing as much as I could..." (David, I1: 41:20).

Due to the perceived lack of power to make independent decisions, there was an evident sense of dissatisfaction regarding the management of the institution and the compromises that complying with local managerial policies engendered.

There was also a sense that conflict was generated partly by unrealistic and decontextualised expectations on the part of management, particularly

in terms of the learning outcomes toward which teachers and students were required to work. Students who had little ability to communicate in English, for example, were expected to reach a relatively high level of communicative proficiency within a matter of months – something that was very difficult to achieve with large groups of learners. This was indicative of a lack of understanding on the part of managers who expected results from teachers that they could not deliver:

Supervisors don't recognise the reality of what the students are actually like and how their expectations of what their education should be differ from ours. It certainly frustrates us because they're not always responsive to our frustrations or our needs (Mark, I1: 11:10).

One of the more prominent sources of conflict then, was the demand that teachers perform at a level that they felt was unattainable due to the actual situation in the classroom – the real 'needs' and abilities of learners and the ability of teachers to meet these. There was a sense among interviewees that the directives of unresponsive institutional authority had superseded their professional judgment. This was illustrative of the conflict between professional autonomy and central administration that characterised their accounts of management in the research context.

### 5.1.2 Accountability and education

A further area of conflict was that created by the need to meet various accountability criteria associated with local public education and perform the professional duties of a teacher simultaneously. As with meeting learning objectives, the conflict was created by the desire to succeed both as an educator and as a responsible employee. This was difficult or impossible to achieve, however, due to time constraints; a high number of contact hours

and the amount of preparation they required made it difficult to manage other bureaucratic imperatives connected to accountability criteria.

It was suggested that the management of the institution had “bought into” the recommendations of an accrediting body, which had proposed that a number of “systems and processes” (in the form of auditing procedures for grading, for example) be implemented at the institution (Ben, I1: 40:30). These accountability measures had affected the professional culture of the organisation but significant change had not been effected by the introduction of a new procedure, regulation or other form of ‘liability protection.’ Lists of ‘learner outcomes’ that prefaced course syllabuses and other curriculum documents for example, were problematised because they were both onerous and symbolic, requiring extra work, but resulting in little by way of improved outcomes:

I can see a kind of business model creeping into teaching, but I can’t put my finger on what the hell’s going on. I find it terribly boring, to be honest; all those lists of 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and I don’t know what it is, but I’ve seen them and of course we have to read them, to take them on board in our job here, but I don’t think it necessarily improves the teaching (James, I1: 18:20).

Other forms of documentism as well, were problematised, as they were perceived as symbolic of ‘quality’ in education, but did not improve teaching or alter the fundamental process of learning assessment:

...there’s more accountability, I’m required to back things up with evidence and be able to explain things to other people – I don’t think that there’s any more quality there because I think there’s just as much haphazardness and fudging of grading and so on. But people want you to be able to explain it and prove your reasoning if challenged. I think there’s that sort of basic paranoia that you’ve got to be able to produce the documentation and provide the rationalisation for everything you do. But...I don’t think there’s any greater quality (Janet, I1: 21:00).

There was a sense among participants that meeting the various requirements of management (regarding accountability measures and other procedural responsibilities) made it difficult to focus on teaching because auditing procedures were so time consuming and arrogated time that might be better spent planning lessons. Time spent outside the classroom, for example, went to answering email, completing paperwork, or attending meetings. There was speculation that supervisors did not understand that “time at our desk is not necessarily down time” (Mark, I1: 41:00) and therefore ‘assigned’ more duties to teachers than they could reasonably handle. The demands placed upon educators outside of the classroom limited what they were able to do inside it and satisfying particular institutional criteria to demonstrate competence in teaching ironically made teachers feel that they were less effective in the classroom. In this way, educators experienced the conflict between professionalism and industry requirements – taking on the conflicting roles of educator and employee was frustrating because it was difficult to feel successful in either capacity.

### 5.1.3 Constant change

In addition to meeting the requirements of the institution vis-à-vis non-teaching duties, conflict was engendered by constant change at the level of management in terms of curriculum reform and institutional policymaking. Being an educator in the local context was “dynamic and constantly changing” (David, I1: 37:55), and “always in flux” (Mark, I1: 43:10), so that “no one semester [was] the same as another semester” (David, I1: 38:00) and teachers’ responsibilities changed “almost on a daily basis” (Sarah, I2: 14:30). The demands of managers at the institution were “almost schizophrenic at times” and frustrated teachers because they felt that the sudden, frequent changes were unfair to both students and faculty at the institution (David, I1: 38:25).

Frequent changes to class numbers, learning objectives and administrative policies made it difficult to develop a stable sense of professional self – to feel like an educator:

The way the programs are changing, I had seven different sections this semester and it's 3 or 4 hours each a week, and it's just into one class and into the next and just trying to stay alive. And this semester I really don't care that much about what [the students] think about me. I'd like them to think that I'm a good teacher, but I don't feel I'm able to demonstrate that I'm a good teacher in my present teaching circumstances, so if I had the chance to get to know them a bit better then I might be a little more concerned with that (Mark, I1: 37:30).

There was a sense then, of being 'pulled in many directions at once' - required to take on multiple professional roles that were sometimes in conflict and changed continually. These were regarded as barriers to the development of professionalism because they were limitations to autonomy and the development of a stable professional practise.

#### 5.1.4 Conflicted pedagogical selves

The conflict between the classroom and the 'office' was a significant catalyst of professional dissatisfaction, but there were further mechanisms of conflict operating within the classroom itself. The first of these conflicts was associated with the many and varied roles that the informants perceived as necessary components of pedagogy – roles that were incongruous in some ways. There were a number of professional 'selves,' for example, that were integrated with classroom practise and necessitated considerable 'flexibility' in 'switching' from one role to another. Foremost among these were the facilitator of learning and the 'friend,' and their binary opposites: the authority figure and the disciplinarian respectively.

The most prominent of teachers' perceived roles was the 'facilitator' – the helper who enabled students to learn without a great deal of direct

instruction or 'lecturing.' This was someone who could "set up an environment" in the classroom that was "conducive to learning" in which students were "comfortable, motivated, [and] engaged" (Mark, I1: 5:30), who functioned as a "crutch," to facilitate learning, but "not [through] teaching" (John, I1: 7:30). The facilitator could be a "reference," a "resource," and "an implicit director of education" as well, but "not a lecturer" (Jeff, I1: 8:15).

In a 'student-centred' classroom, it was important to maintain a "good rapport" with students, while "helping" them and "giving them more opportunities in the world" through language teaching (James, I1: 3:20). The teacher was a "learner-trainer specialist" (Sarah, I1: 7:30), who assisted students with skills-development and training to prepare them for standardised testing and employment respectively. Additionally, the teacher could take on the roles of program and materials designer and "conduit of ideas" (John, I1: 7:30), functioning as a "reference" and "resource" for students (Jeff, I1: 8:15) and guiding them toward the successful completion of their programs of study. Working as a teacher in this context involved playing a "complex role" as a "role model" (David, I1: 13:00), "entertainer," "confessor," and "friend" (Ben, I1: 5:00), who was "kind" to students (Sarah, I1: 48:10).

Adaptability and flexibility, in fact, were identified as important elements of local teaching practise as these qualities enabled educators to manage the various pressures that attended their professional obligations:

I think that my role can change depending on who's employing me and who I'm teaching. Here...I don't need to have as much personal interaction with the students per say. Here I feel my job is just to take a lesson into the classroom, introduce it and move on to the next lesson. I see it not so much as someone who has to lead inside the classroom...I'm not necessarily someone who needs to be at the front of the classroom explaining everything all of the time (Mark, I1: 5:45).

Interestingly (and likely not coincidentally), adaptability and flexibility were also highly valued as traits of successful employees in local management discourse, just as student-centred learning was the officially sanctioned institutional teaching ‘methodology.’

The ‘learner centred’ approach to teaching, however, was also problematised because of the perceived difficulties associated with its local application – despite its promotion at the level of institutional management. It was noted, for example, that the student-centred model required “students who are hungry for knowledge” and already in possession of a “set of skills” (Ben, I1: 4:00), which did not accord with teacher perceptions of learners in the local context generally. Methods of “indirect” instruction then, could be “more difficult to apply” at the institution and “a level of more formal teaching” (Ben, I1: 4:10) and “explicit learning” (Jeff, I1: 40:30) were also required.

Teachers as well, needed to support students who struggled with the curriculum, or were simply not interested in studying. Working as a teacher in this context involved being an “encourager” and “motivator,” (David, I1: 13:00, Sarah, I1: 48:10), who could demonstrate the importance of learning to students:

(I will do) whatever it takes to get them [the students] on task and...to make their reason for being here either less painful, or more obvious to them...whatever it takes...the vast majority of my students think that I am here for them, not for me (Sarah, I1, 48:30).

This exemplified the conflict that teachers faced when they were tasked with facilitating learning, but found that “getting people to do their best” (David, I1: 13:50) superseded the officially sanctioned role of the teacher as simply a guide for students who were already eager to learn.

Learning to be a “classroom management teacher” and disciplinarian was also necessary because students did not respond to a strictly ‘learner-centred’ approach (Jeff, I1: 7:55) and sometimes exhibited disruptive behaviors in the classroom:

Here I feel that I have to be more of a ‘kindergarten cop’...more of a behaviour manager than a teacher, than a facilitator. So it’s rather limited not because of the university or the rules or anything, just because of the situation with the students and the background...we’re teaching in a very teacher-centred way, having to rely more on rote, things like that (Mark, I1: 44:00).

This required frequent ‘role switching’ from facilitator to encourager to disciplinarian (and others), which could be a source of considerable frustration:

Sometimes I think, you know, you’re almost on the verge of madness because you can switch from one role to another, it’s a kind of play-acting role...yes, you encourage, you say the soft words, you try and encourage people that way but occasionally you’ve got to be really hard and tough and say, ‘no, this is what you’re going to do, because I know that’s good for you and you don’t’ (David, I1: 13:30).

The situation in the classrooms was such that more time was spent “teaching students how to learn and how to behave” than was used to teach language (Sarah, I1: 5:10). It was perceived as difficult to reconcile the idealised image of the teacher as facilitator and friend, with the reality of the teacher as authority figure and disciplinarian. In fact, the desire to connect with students and the need to control them to effect learning was a source of conflict that could result in “play-acting” (David, I1: 13:20) and adopting roles that felt unnatural:

I’m a teacher who has fun in class, has enjoyable classes – I’m not a good classroom management teacher, I’m not a strict disciplinarian, although I guess I’m learning how to be that here, although I’m not by nature. I think I’m a good teacher because



students have fun in my class and they want to do well in my class, so I think that I'm all right (Jeff, I1: 39:10).

Overall, there was a sense that conflict between 'official' roles and 'reality' made it difficult to effectively carry out professional duties associated with local professional practise. This was true outside of the classroom, where the collision of bureaucracy and education represented a division between the 'educator' and the 'auditor.' It also applied inside the classroom, where the perceived need for conflicting pedagogies created tension between the 'friend' and the 'authoritarian.' These conflicts were also expressed as fundamental divergences both between teachers and managers, and between teachers and students respectively.

## 5.2 Interpersonal conflict: Teachers and students

Reports of conflict between teachers and students were illustrated in informant accounts of students' classroom behaviour that did not match teacher expectations in terms of both student attitudes and demonstrations of learning. Fundamentally, the conflict originated in student and teacher expectations; students apparently expected to pass their courses and successfully graduate from the university – reportedly with minimal effort - while teachers expected students to be engaged and apply themselves to learning English and realising these aspirations.

It was commonly held, however, that most students would not be able to reach the levels of English communicative proficiency required to enter baccalaureate programs at the institution. There was also a sense that students were resistant to higher education in various ways, including attitudes they adopted toward learning and behaviour they exhibited in the classroom – both of which signified a level of disdain for the entire process. This was a significant area of conflict in the professional lives of teachers, who could neither generate support for education among students, nor

‘produce’ the types of student learning outcomes that they felt were criteria for their own professional success.

### 5.2.1 Curriculum versus reality

It was also a source of frustration for teachers, who indicated that they felt caught in the middle of the great divide that separated the demands of the curriculum and the needs and abilities of the students. Only “a minority of students,” for example, had the “requisite competency” to study their subjects in English and were therefore “disadvantaged” at a university where studying English was the only option available to them (Janet, I1: 42:30). Students then, were “at a clear disadvantage” (John, I1: 39:30) studying in English because they were unable to express themselves competently and were “just not getting” English-based instruction (Jeff: I1: 27:05).

Students were also, in many instances, uncooperative (and even badly behaved) and possibly uncommitted to being ‘educated.’ Many of the students had “no interest” in their teachers or, in many cases, in learning (Mark, I1: 36:15). They did not “have the self-discipline or interest to sit [in the classroom] and behave in a mature and responsible manner” (Mark, I1: 41:00) and were “rather difficult to teach,” due to a “lack of study skills, lack of interest and lack of motivation” (James, I1: 4:25).

This was partly due to the fact that students were being “forced along a development path” that was in conflict with “so many other social and cultural roles” that were available to them (David, I2: 21:30). It was also related to the ‘culture’ of the students, who were characterised as “the lowest of the low” (in terms of scholastic aptitude) so that it was not possible to “expect too much out of them” (Jeff, I1: 12:00) because they did not appear to “exhibit much interest in the world or in world issues” (James, I1: 17:30).

### 5.2.2 Student resistance

Students were described as incompassiant in the classroom and in some instances were “unteachable” because they were so uncooperative (Janet, I1: 9:00). It was suggested that this was a form of resistance to the entire experience of higher education on the part of students:

Many of them won't do any work outside the classroom or even pay attention when they're in it. It's like they're forcing themselves not to get engaged in the process and that's an expression of resistance, I think. A number of them seem to deliberately block off what's going on, and I think that's conscious (Ben, I1: 37:00).

It was also framed as a lack of interest in the curriculum coupled with a resistance to learning:

[Students have] just no interest in doing homework...I'm not sure if it's English specifically - maybe learning, resistance to learning - just the lack of interest in the classroom, in the lesson, participation. This is the first time in my teaching career, this year, where students just refuse to do activities. Disruptive behaviour in class and again there's probably other reasons, but I see it as a lack of interest in the subject (Mark, I1: 38:00).

Again, this resistance was also conceived as arising from local cultural effects that conflicted with institutional pedagogies:

The resistance I notice is more to do with being in a classroom and being taught...because it's not the way they function, they function in a group, like, I don't know if tribal's the right word, they don't want to be an individual listening to a lecture, they want to feel they're part of a group and they're doing things together and it's getting done at the same time as having some social comfort (Janet, I1: 52:00).

It was not clearly understood among the interviewees exactly why such high levels of apathy and resistance toward learning were observed among students. There was speculation, however, that these could be attributed to

the apparent divergence between the curriculum and the abilities of the students. In other words, students were demoralised because they could not hope to reach the standards set for them by the institution and acted out as a way of expressing and coping with their frustrations. In any event, student attitudes and apparent lack of ability were factors that complicated the relationships between teachers, students, and management, and made it difficult for them to work together without experiencing conflict.

### 5.2.3 Lack of ‘critical thinking’

The conflict between students, management, and teachers that was attributed to a lack of communicative proficiency in English, was exacerbated by a reported deficiency in ‘critical thinking’ skills among students. This was regarded as a further hindrance to their progress in language learning and in generally becoming ‘educated’ and revealed a general lack of perceived ‘suitability’ to education among the student body:

...most of the students don’t deserve to be here – in any educational institution – they just happen to be here. They don’t qualify as students...they’re not meant to be students. Education, ideas, mental processing – I don’t think it’s for everyone (John, I1: 12:00).

Many of the students purportedly had “no ability” to think critically (Janet, I1: 56:00) and teachers’ jobs necessarily involved the teaching of critical thinking skills as well as language in order to transition from “the drilling model of education to the critical thinking approach” (Janet, I1: 55:00). This was also regarded as an effect of socio-cultural influences that conflicted with the discourse of commercialised education endorsed by the institution:

When the participants in the society have never been required or challenged to think outside of what they’ve been told to think, are they really getting a quality education? How do they jump

through and become the entrepreneur of tomorrow when they've never had to think in that way? So, are they truly developing if that [critical thinking] is not one of the elements? (Sarah, I1: 29:30).

Students were also characterised as circumscribed and acquiescent in their thinking, presumably as a result of living under an authoritarian regime:

'There's no questioning of authority and I don't see any free thought - again, the ones that I see. There are some pretty cool and innovative and forward-thinking young people and some that are amazing in this country, but the ones that I see which is the largest intake of the university, there's a handful of anyone who's even ever thought of having freedom of thought, as a concept. They don't even know they don't have it (Sarah, I1: 24:00).

The perceived inability to think critically on the part of the students was presented as a major problem as this seeming deficiency could not only prevent real teaching and learning locally, but complicated the roles of teachers, whose ability to reach official learning objectives and outcomes was compromised as a result. As with student levels of achievement, attitudes, and behaviour, an apparent lack of 'thinking' ability was presented as a conflict between management, teachers, and students because it prevented teachers from successfully reaching managerially prescribed outcomes for learners.

#### **5.2.4 Control and freedom**

There was a perceived 'gap' as well, that existed between the explicitly stated aims of local higher education, and the realities that were observed in the course of trying to implement them. This was a further source of conflict for teachers, who recognised elements of the local social contract as barriers to student creativity and success. There was speculation, for example, that the curriculum had been ideologically neutralised in an attempt to avoid upsetting local distributions of power, but also recognition

of the potential deficiencies in higher education that had been stripped of politics and reconfigured for ‘skills development:’

I still think there’s the question of, ‘how much do we want people to think and think creatively, to make their own decisions, and hence change?’ versus, ‘what can we do to keep the status quo?’ I think [local higher education] gives people a little bit of knowing how to do something but does not necessarily educate them (Sarah, I2: 8:30).

Education in the UAE then, while it was practical and skills-oriented, was not educative in the sense that it was either liberating or empowering. The contradiction that existed between teaching students to be “responsible and independent” and working for “organisations [which] are going the opposite way” (Ben, I2: 48:30), for example, was noted as an example of the irony in teaching the value of entrepreneurialism and independent thought in a highly regulated way. The ideology of independence and self-sufficiency was seen as problematic in a non-democratic context where the personal freedom to make decisions had been curtailed.

#### **5.2.5 The social contract and personal responsibility**

The informants identified the contradiction inherent in the provision of universal free public education (as a feature of the welfare system), with a view to preparing students for employment within the competitive private sector. This was an example of the perceived incongruity between the welfare state and the free market and the potential friction between the two discourses in UAE society. It was difficult, for example, to understand why students needed to attend classes at the university at all given the social contract in the UAE and the generosity of the federal government:

I really don’t know [why students are provided with free education]...there’s all this talk of Emiratisation and we’re supposedly teaching them English and business skills so they can

compete in the workplace, but on the other hand they're given so much for free that they don't need to go and work (Janet, I1: 29:00).

It was also noted that 'competitiveness' had been removed from university entrance requirements in order to promote inclusivity, though this could impede progress and potentially hamper 'improvement.'

I think in the West people understand the value of a college or university education and a certain number want to go. But there are certain entry requirements that you have to achieve. But here the bar is so low that anybody, if you want to go to college or university, you can go. I think here...they're trying to include everybody, but by doing that you're not really improving at the rate you could (Mark, I2: 7:00).

These issues were regarded as impediments to progress in that they robbed students of their ambition and prevented them from appreciating the value of their education; as the students were "not hungry," they would be less likely to be competitive and "develop themselves" (David, I1: 39:30):

...they're spoiled, quite frankly, because if they drop out there's no penalty and no student loans to pay back, and they're, as far as I know, comfortably provided for by the state anyway (James, I1: 33:00).

This was also framed as a problem related to both society and culture:

[The students] don't have to worry about student loans, so it's harder to make them care. It's hard to conduct classes with students who don't care. And that says more about the culture than it does about the education system I think (Jeff: I1: 20:10).

Without negative social or economic consequences attached to the possibility of academic failure then, it was less likely that students would succeed academically:

There's very little consequence in terms of their future life, the students' results have very little consequence. They have a consequence in terms of within the family, you know in terms of shame and honour and saving face, but they don't have any consequences in terms of employability or income so there's no real interest in learning because they're financially secure, no matter what. Somebody will take care of them; they won't have to be self-sufficient in any way (Janet, I1: 25:10).

The generosity of the federal government was also perceived not only as a 'threat' to local education, but also as a barrier to entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency among UAE nationals beyond higher education:

I know why they're trying to get people in the private sector and it's a good idea, but I don't know if it's going to be successful. I look at my students and I can't imagine them running their own business. And I would do the exact same thing that most locals do if I had the chance – I would get into the public sector and be taken care of for the rest of my life and not to work much so, it's a hard sell..." (Jeff, I1: 10:10)

There was a perceived conflict then, between discourses of commercial enterprise, personal responsibility and the apparent public sector orientation of the local workforce. This conflict was regarded as a barrier to the successful implementation of vocationally centred education that sought to foster a sense of entrepreneurship in students.

#### 5.2.6 Ostensible and real purposes of education

There was considerable speculation as to what the 'real purpose' of education was given the low success rate of local educational institutions in terms of raising graduate employment rates. It was not clear why students spent years of their lives attending classes at the university when so few of them would 'use' the skills they had developed to secure gainful employment. Even in cases where students entered the labour market



following graduation, however, they would simply be “foisted on companies who [had] to hire them to do jobs they [didn’t] like” (James, I1: 23:00). Overall, though, it was perceived as unlikely that students would seek employment following university, and the level of effort made for the sake of nationalising the local private sector workforce was therefore inexplicable:

It’s a mystery to me. It doesn’t make sense, doesn’t add up. We’re trying to educate these young people to be active participants in the world of work and none of them are going to work. They don’t need to, they don’t want to, their families don’t want them to, so...there’s some agenda that we’re – that’s how I feel – there’s some agenda that escapes me (Janet, I2: 14:00).

There was further supposition as to the motivations of the students – why they had decided to pursue higher education. There were a number of possible explanations in addition to “potentially find[ing] a job” (Ben, I1: 35:40), including “getting out of the house” (John, I1: 39:10) and “staving off marriage” (Ben, I1: 35:35):

Many students, I’m going to say half of the students...are here not for anything remotely academic. It’s their last hurrah before they’re married and they’re here to have some fun or, you know, just socialising like normal people would because they’re very limited at home, or they’re here compelled to try to do something to increase their standing for marital prospects (Sarah, I2: 46:00).

The idea that attending university was simply the best option available to students was commonly expressed; although students did not seem to be engaged in learning, the imagined local alternatives to receiving an education were perceived as less appealing:

I know our [female students] don’t have anything else to do except get married and have babies. So whether or not they’re ever going to have a job, this is something for them to do (Jeff, I1: 21:30).

Students' decision to attend university was regarded as simply an alternative to unemployment, domesticity, and boredom and was a source of conflict because it meant that students had "no interest whatsoever" in actually studying (James, I1: 23:00). This paradox also served to underscore the mismatch between institutional aims and student needs:

[The students] even tell me to my face they hate reading, and here they are in so-called tertiary education...and quite frankly, in any other country...those students would be going into hairdressing, or working on the checkout in a supermarket (James, I1: 23:00).

High rates of attrition in local (and national) higher education were also seen as a likely result of discordance between the curriculum and student needs:

If there was a non-academic option given to them...I think more [of the students] would choose to continue in a program. So we're setting them up to fail by not offering that option and all the institutions in the country are doing that – the same thing, not giving the non-academic option. We're doing them a disservice and that's why they're not happy to be here doing this...we're not providing the appropriate product for our consumer (Sarah, I2: 44:30).

The perception of contradictions surrounding local education made it difficult to understand the 'real purpose' of teaching and learning at the university. The apparent needs of the students and the ostensible objectives of the curriculum were regarded as incongruous and therefore catalysts of tension and conflict between teachers and their students. It was also suggested that social and cultural factors associated with welfarism contributed to this incongruity and ultimately made it difficult for educators to reach some of the professional goals that had been set for them at the level of institutional management and national government. The conflict between the officially stated aims of education and the perceived reality of local social arrangements then, was a source of considerable tension and a

divergence that made fulfilling professional roles and responsibilities considerably more difficult for educators.

### 5.3 Alienation from local society

The various conflicts that infused the professional identities of TESOL practitioners were often connected to expressed feelings of estrangement from students as members of local culture. Specifically, this had to do with a perceived sense of dissonance between teachers and students, which informants most commonly articulated in terms of ‘culture.’ Analyses of local culture were employed to explain the seemingly irreconcilable breach that existed between educators as members of Western culture and students as members of a Middle Eastern/Arab-Islamic culture. In particular, this perceived cultural divide was invoked as a way of explaining the apparent failure of Western pedagogy in the local educational context. This suggestion, in fact, was repeated with sufficient regularity for it to be considered a prominent theme in the interview data. It was also a highly significant feature of professional identity for the interviewees, as locally practising Western TESOL practitioners who spent a substantial proportion of their working lives with members of local communities.

Difficulties in implementing Western education locally were ascribed to perceived cultural differences that arose at the interface between the West and the Arab World and confounded efforts to educate local students. These were connected most often to collectively held values associated with UAE society as part of Arab and Islamic cultures – values concerning social dynamics such as work ethic, family orientation, and tradition specifically. Cultural differences, however, were also described as deficiencies in local culture, particularly when these were examined through the ‘lens’ of Western culture. It was these deficiencies that evidently prevented the successful implementation of higher education locally and limited its prospects for

success in terms of its stated objectives – nationalising the UAE’s private sector workforce and fostering entrepreneurialism in young UAE nationals.

### 5.3.1 Separation and estrangement from local culture

There was a sense among the informants that local society was almost entirely separate from the expatriate workforce – foreign faculty as ‘outsiders’ had contact with UAE nationals, but only within the classroom and the institution itself. It was difficult then, to become acquainted with UAE nationals and the lives of students beyond the classroom were apparently a mystery. Emirati culture was described as “vague” (James, I2: 32:50) and difficult to understand or know about with any degree of “depth” (Mark, I2: 37:25). There were connections made between local culture, religion and ‘Arab culture’ but it was otherwise “difficult to see any evidence of local culture” (James, I2: 33:10) because it was ‘hidden’ and inaccessible to foreign workers in the UAE.

This was not considered entirely unusual, however, given the context and the perceived barriers between foreign and local ‘cultures:’

I know a lot of people that live in Dubai and they’ve never met a local, and I feel lucky because I get to teach some of the young Emiratis but I can’t say that I’ve met a local ...there doesn’t really seem to be an opportunity for me to meet locals very much apart from the students that are forced to learn under me (Jeff, I2: 7:00).

The prospect of ‘mixing’ socially with UAE nationals then, did not appear to be a commonly held expectation among teachers; even meeting local Emiratis was rare and seldom a possibility outside the institution.

This may have been, in part, related to the difficulties associated with working in the local professional context. Because of time constraints and the urgency of reaching learning objectives, for example, teachers had little time to ‘socialise’ with students and get to know them in contexts other than

the classroom. Issues related to the curriculum at the institution also made it difficult for students and teachers to interact in ways that were not mediated by learning objectives and outcomes. The exigency of career development that infused the institutional discourse, for example, was presented as a barrier to authentic intercultural communication between teachers and students:

We don't encourage them [the students] to be honest about their culture. We encourage them to lie about aspiring to a Western trajectory with their life. And they oblige us by fantasising or, you know, lying about, "Yes, I'm going to get a bachelor's (degree) and I'm going to become a business [person] and I'm going to blah, blah, blah..." And you know the truth is they're going to go sit at home and do nothing. And so, because we're not inviting them to be honest, and tell their true story, we find out a lot less about the culture than we might otherwise (Janet, I2: 22:15).

It was difficult then, to 'get to know' students beyond the context of teaching and learning English. There were few opportunities to socialise in any capacity, particularly outside of the classroom. Even within the classroom, however, communication seemed to be limited to the curriculum and its implementation and teachers were not learning much from students. Overall, there was little explanation offered as to what the everyday experiences of students might have been like after they left the institution each day. This was a significant element of professional identity for English language teachers, as they knew relatively little about the students with whom they worked on a daily basis.

### **5.3.2 Avoidance of and exclusion from local society**

In addition to being mysterious in some ways, the UAE was regarded as a "closed society" where making "local friends" was very difficult (Sarah, I2: 4:20). It seemed that UAE nationals were "not really interested" in getting to know foreign expats and preferred to avoid social contact with

them outside of the workplace (Jeff, I2: 7:30). This difficulty in connecting with local communities was regarded partly as an effect of being ‘guests’ and also as a consequence of a locally imposed divide between ‘guest workers’ and UAE citizens:

We’re not invited into the family home as such, as expat workers here. I haven’t really been involved [in local society] other than with the students I teach. It’s clearly their desire here to keep the guest workers separate from the broader culture (Ben, I2: 6:10).

There was also a sense, however, that teachers had not come to the UAE “for the local culture” (Mark, I2: 32:20) and some cases, avoided contact with Emiratis because of “the culture gap” a perceived barrier that would prevent intercultural communication and understanding between members of Western cultures and local culture (John, I2: 24:00).

There was little apparent desire then, to mix socially with local UAE nationals or to learn more about their customs and/or lifestyles. There was resistance, for example, to the idea of learning to speak Arabic as there was “no real need” to learn the language (Ben, I2: 7:10), nor any real desire to study the language:

I’m mildly interested in learning Arabic, but it’s not really needed here. English gets me by so easily so...I’m glad that I know more about this part of the world and I may have picked up a little bit of Arabic along the way but it’s not really interesting to me compared to other places I’ve lived and other cultures I’ve learned about (Jeff, I2: 6:30).

There was scant motivation to learn to communicate with members of local communities then, and this issue was specifically associated with UAE culture:

I love languages but I have no desire, no interest in learning Arabic, and that still surprises me. Because always in my life, everywhere I’ve been, I’ve been interested in languages. But no, I

just – I don't know why. That says a lot, doesn't it? (Janet, I2: 31:30).

It was implied that this was a situation unique to the local context; teaching English in other countries would often involve a degree of integration between teachers and students. That is, English language teachers would have made an effort to learn local languages and mix socially with students or with members of the societies in which they lived in other teaching contexts. This type of extra-institutional social contact was effectively forbidden in the UAE, however, though this was not a source of professional dissatisfaction for teachers. The separation between the foreign and the local was perceived as significant and all encompassing in the professional context; teachers did not plan to integrate with local society and did not feel that they were either required or welcome to do this in any event.

### 5.3.3 Cultural traits of UAE nationals

The division that seemed to exist between UAE nationals and foreign expatriate professionals was partly related to perceived cultural traits associated with UAE nationals. UAE 'cultural qualities,' for example, were constructed as indicators of the various ways in which Emiratis were dissimilar to Western people and also socially incompatible with them. Local culture was defined primarily in terms of difference; a kind of contrastive framing informed impressions of UAE culture and led to classifications of UAE nationals as juxtaposed with people from Western countries. Emiratis were also judged according to how successfully they interacted (or would likely interact) with foreign expatriates. It was considered unusual, for example, for a UAE national to interact with 'international' people due to irreconcilable differences in outlook and communication style:

We hang out with him (a local UAE national), he's very funny, very smart...but I don't think he's a typical Arab because he hangs out with people from all over the world, so he picks up a lot of ideas and that's what makes him very developed and very smooth. He's diplomatic and he knows a lot of things...he's one of those few people I'm interacting with (John, I2: 22:00).

Different aspects of Emirati culture were explored and distinguished from Western culture. The most prominent of these were ways in which the local work ethic could be contrasted with a 'Western' work ethic. This could be seen in the behaviour of students at the institution for example; whose apparent sense of social entitlement had compromised their work ethic:

...they do expect life to be handed to them, but why should we judge that? It's because we come from the West with the strong work ethic that we don't actually respect that, but if that's your culture...what's wrong with that? That's the way it is here... [they are] sailing through life without any sense of responsibility...(Janet, I2: 27:00)

This evaluation was also extended to UAE nationals and their attitudes toward employment and professionalism:

People don't necessarily have a strong work ethic here or understand the value of doing a job, be it at a gas station or at the head of a company. All the local people seem to want that top management position here, even our students who have not really done very much to improve themselves or to learn a lot (Mark, I1: 43:10).

The general impression among interviewees was that Emiratis felt it was "beneath them to work at menial jobs" (James, I1: 48:30) and did not have "ambitions" of any sort (John, I1: 35:20). In fact, the participants expressed the idea that UAE nationals regarded work disdainfully and wanted to earn high salaries in exchange for very little effort:



This is a terrible stereotype, but I think that in general Emiratis want to do the least amount of work possible...it's not that they're lazy people, it's just what they're used to – pushing their work onto somebody else and still getting paid a lot of money (Jeff, I2: 10:00).

This was also applied to students at the institution whose work ethic was tempered by familial concerns and the imperative of spending time with family members during the workday:

America expects you to work hard, and it rewards you if you do, but most people don't come from a culture that works that hard - they come from cultures that are more family-based, like our students, you know, who take time to out of the day to sit with the family (Janet, I2: 28:35).

Evaluations of UAE culture were based upon impressions of local society and resulted in a constructed image of an Emirati cultural 'Other.' In some cases, this image was contrasted with that of 'international' or 'Western' cultures to demonstrate ways in which Emirati culture was dissimilar to these. The main sub-themes that emerged here were those of difference and incompatibility between Western and Middle Eastern lifestyles and points of view. These related to the overall sense of alienation that existed between foreign English language teachers, their students and the organisation for which they worked (as a UAE social institution).

#### **5.3.4 The 'essence' of 'Emirati culture'**

A number of perceived UAE cultural traits were also associated with "Arab culture" or "Muslim culture," with which Emirati culture evidently shared some essential qualities. The UAE was described as part of the "Muslim world" (Janet, I1: 36:50), or the "Arab world in the Gulf" (James, I2: 52:05), for example. These were used as ways to contextualise UAE society, but they were also ways of explaining UAE culture (in terms of its relation to 'Arab culture') and what it means to be an Emirati:

I think that what they call Emirati culture is Arab culture and I think that they all have the same dress, the same dances, the same music and everything, I don't think there's one thing that really separates them from Saudi [Arabia], for example ...when you talk to a local about what is Emirati culture they're pretty much telling you what Arab culture is (Jeff, I2: 5:10).

Specific cultural traits exhibited by UAE nationals could also be attributed to their being Arabs and demonstrating behaviors that were common to Arab cultures:

They're very good speakers, very good communicators. I think that's an Arab thing – they're just verbal people. Look how much they talk on the phone to each other – they're always talking (Jeff, I2: 14:00).

Another cultural trait identified was the importance placed on family life in UAE society (and behaviors associated with that), which was itself described as “basically a tribe” (James, I1: 23:00):

Family is so important in the Arab world – people will just say ‘I've got to go home because someone's arriving at the airport or there's a funeral going on, I've got to go to the village...’ and people just disappear for three days. The workplace seems to be more lenient when people go away for family matters (James, I2: 53:00)

The prominence of the family as a part of the cultural heritage of local society was also presented as an essential part of UAE culture:

I see a country continuing to modernise, but I would like to see them not go so far so that they lose touch with the better aspects of their cultural heritage. They have a lot of values I wouldn't like to see eroded too quickly, or the change come around in a way that can protect...some very positive things in terms of family and group support and collective culture I'm very fond of...small villages and communities for example, and the collective family which is largely disappearing in my country and in the Western world (Ben, I2: 9:00).

There were also references to local mindsets – particularly as they affected the performance of students in local higher education. The main idea here was that Emirati culture was not entirely suited to education as it was utilized in the UAE and so students struggled with the requirements of education and the standards it demanded:

I don't think it's become yet a part of their [the students'] innate psyche – to aspire to an education. I don't wish to put that down...I don't know why we are so obsessed with education and achievement and career progression in the West (Janet, I2: 39:00).

Descriptions of the “essence” of UAE culture, or which cultural traits were perceived as common to Emiratis, suggested a tendency to construct UAE nationals as fundamentally different from Western people and fundamentally the same as one another. There were also indications that UAE nationals were regarded as similar to members of other Arab societies, particularly with regard to commonly held cultural effects thought to be specific to those societies.

Given the amount of time that English teachers spent with their students, it is highly significant that they knew so little about them, and yet appeared to know so much about their culture. In most cases, interactions between students and teachers were contextualised in terms of student engagement with the curriculum and, more broadly, in terms of potential engagement with institutionally sanctioned learner outcomes (associated with nationalising the local workforce). What was also significant here was the manner in which lack of student engagement was characterised as cultural in origin, and also related to perceived cultural deficiencies that would make it difficult for UAE nationals to be successful participants in the emerging private sector. Both the apparent sense of alienation on the part of teachers regarding their students and their perspectives on the

culture of the students were recurring themes in interview data and also critical facets of teacher identity in this context.

## **5.4 The discourse of commercialisation**

Overall, the significance of local higher education was explained in terms that foregrounded its commercial orientation and potential to stimulate positive commercial outcomes in local society. There were a number of ways in which commercial aspects of local higher education were expressed in terms of the purposes of education for students and in the context of societies in the age of globalisation. In particular, these related to the ways in which education could not only empower individuals by preparing them for participation in the workforce, but also empower societies by enabling them to compete in the international knowledge economy.

### **5.4.1 Education for employability**

Becoming educated was regarded as a highly practical endeavour through which students could become more successful – particularly in terms of securing gainful employment; being educated enabled individuals to become skilled, independent, and competitive, thereby empowering them. Education was considered a means to an end in this sense – something that one needed to distinguish oneself and gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace with a developed skill set involving the ability to think independently and innovatively. This appraisal of education accorded with that of the institution, which had identified the acquisition of skills with a view to enhancing vocational eligibility as the primary objective of education.

Local education then, was described as a means to “get people into employment” (David, I2: 18:30) as UAE education was entirely “geared

towards vocational training” (James, I2: 38:00). Higher education was also regarded as an avenue to empowerment for Emiratis, who would become “marketable applicants” through learning “basic skills” at universities (Jeff, I1: 15:30). The main idea was that education was very practical in terms of its purposes and likely outcomes; it was an investment in people to prepare them for productive and independent careers.

#### 5.4.2 Education for modernisation

Educational ‘employability training,’ however, was also located in the sphere of development and modernisation in the UAE. Educating the population of the UAE was regarded as a way in which the entire society could be ‘developed:’

The role of education here is to develop a society, and to modernise a society and I find that vocation would be a part of that (Ben, I1: 5:00).

It was commonly held that education had the potential to “transform or develop” the UAE (Mark, I2: 20:50) and create “something more sustainable” (John, I2: 45:05) by cultivating an “educated, competent population” (Mark, I2: 23:10) that would be “competitive in the future in a global marketplace” and allow Emiratis to enjoy a continued high standard of living (Mark, I2: 24:20).

The themes of transformation, development and modernisation were used interchangeably here, but were taken up to explain the transformation of the UAE from a ‘traditional’ to a ‘modern’ society. An essential component of this transition was motivating Emirati students to think differently – to think critically and innovatively. This was regarded as an official aspect of the teacher’s role in the UAE:

I think my job is to make students aware, to get them to think, and if that has an effect on the local culture over time, I think it’s

a by-product of what I do. I think they [the UAE government] are trying to change the population. I think they're trying to change the skill set - to a certain extent the mindset - and to modernise the people as well as the infrastructure of the country I think they would like to see [UAE Nationals] more educated and more capable of being able to sustain an independent economy (Ben, I2: 7:15).

Helping the local population through educating them was seen as part of the job of English language teachers, who had been “brought in to play a development role” (Mark, I2: 4:40). The process of development, manifested as changing ‘local mindsets,’ however, could be difficult to achieve:

I think it's quite a challenging job, to change a mindset is a huge task and that mindset cannot be just changed in one year. The bottom line is we are producing people who have a certain degree of knowledge base but also are able to sustain themselves, involving human development...(David, I2: 13:20).

Part of developing the UAE then, was enabling young UAE nationals to be self-sufficient and independent thinking workers who would be able to assist in the creation and sustenance of the nation's emerging economy.

#### 5.4.3 TESOL and the global market

Notions of modernisation and development were associated with internationalising and joining the global knowledge economy. This could also involve a degree of Westernisation, however, which was sometimes used interchangeably with forms of development. The UAE government's decision to staff its institutions of higher learning with foreign (largely Western) professionals was also presented in this way – as an element of development through rising standards of academic rigor:

To them the best is Western style – they know that our education system is much more rigorous and they want us to come in and kind of...work with their people and try to...hold them to the

same standards that we were held to. But to them, the best is from the West (Jeff, I2: 4:20).

English-based instruction at the tertiary level was contextualised as a necessary element of preparation for working in an international context – particularly one as internationalised as the UAE labour force. This was also the official position of the institution and a major part of preparing students for competent workforce participation. There was a perceived need for English language proficiency among graduates of UAE HEIs, as the UAE wanted to see itself “as an international player” and so would need a population that was fluent in English in order to “compete in a global world” (Ben, I1: 25:00).

Being fluent in English would also “give [students] an edge in employment opportunities and in the marketplace” after graduation (Mark, I1: 25:10). The purpose of English language instruction in UAE higher education then, was to enable graduates both to “compete on the world stage” and be conversant in the domestic “lingua franca” as well (James, I1: 15:30). Learning to speak English was also framed as a kind of modernisation for students – a way in which they could access the commercial world:

If they would like to see themselves doing business at an international level, then they need English-mediated education. There’s no alternative, there’s only religion and tradition – something culturally driven or...something coming from the West (John, I2: 40:00).

Education then, was regarded as a means to modernising and developing UAE society by enabling UAE nationals to join the labour force, becoming at once both self-sufficient and competitive ‘players’ in the global knowledge economy.

#### 5.4.4 Privatisation

The creation of a sustainable and independent economy was associated with the privatisation of public sector ‘industries’ in which many UAE nationals were employed. While privatisation was not uniformly characterised as a positive development, it was described as an inevitable process in societies - including the United Arab Emirates. The common theme here was that of inevitability – as public funds disappeared, the state would have no choice but to embark upon a schedule of privatisation, granting access to the world economy and embracing the free market in order to survive. As public services could be wasteful and were costly, it was likely only a matter of time before they were sold to private interests.

Privatisation was also identified as a solution to the problem of declining public funds that would likely accompany the depletion of petroleum reserves in the GCC region. The commonly expressed solution to this issue was engagement with business as a means to protect UAE society from collapse:

If the Emiratis can't participate in the private sector when the oil runs out, which at the moment they can't, what's going to happen to them? They have to have a fall-back position for when the oil runs out...there has to be some fall-back position so there has to be business (Janet, I1: 27:00).

The perception was that education could facilitate the transition from a patronage-based welfare state to a competitive free market system in which transnational corporations - as opposed to local government-supported institutions - employed graduates. Education in the UAE could be regarded as “pushing people forward,” which was necessary because the “post-oil” UAE would be “incredibly challenging” for Emiratis without some type of alternate system in place (David, I2: 1:00:10).



Privatisation was regarded as a process that would predictably occur in the United Arab Emirates as it had occurred in other societies as an answer to declining public wealth:

I think an element of privatisation is inevitable, because the state will not be able to continue providing. And we've seen that...with the pushing of entrepreneurship. And also they cannot provide jobs for everyone - this booming population. In terms of certain elements of the economy that should or should not be privatised, they're facing the same thing, just at a later stage than we are in other countries (Sarah: I1: 20:00).

In some cases, converting public institutions to private organisations was framed as a solution to the rising costs operating nationalised industries:

I come from the UK, which is a mixed economy...and almost all of the institutions have been privatised. I think it becomes clear after a while that they become money drains and the government becomes less and less capable of supporting loss-making organisations, they look for solutions and as the population grows here I suspect they will first of all want some of the expertise of privatisation but also the cost savings of supporting a nationalised electricity generating industry or telephone industry or whatever. They've already started...it's not yet open competition but I think they'll move increasingly that way (Ben, I1: 23:00).

The idea that more profitable institutions must eventually replace those that were publically subsidised was commonly held and regarded as a “natural thing” (John, I1: 43:00) that could reduce vulnerability while fostering self-sufficiency among UAE nationals and aiding in the development of a local society:

...they want to have a civilisation, not just a culture. And by civilisation I mean hierarchical organisation of society based on knowledge, ideas, concepts and principles, so they want to instill these new things that come from Western civilisation. That's why they're investing money and time into education. One day, the oil will run out, at least they will be able to run on knowledge, they'll be able to produce something – I don't know what they can

produce but at least they will be able to manage and run this country on their own because right now it's run by foreign specialists (John, I1: 33:00).

The idea of self-sufficiency was also presented as an outcome of privatisation and individualisation that would aid in the process of developing UAE society:

I think having and accepting additional responsibilities for their personal futures, and that of the country and society...is a big part of development in this country, as things will be changing. The students that I teach at my level have very little personal responsibility outside their home role...and that is going to be a large part of development in the future of this country (Sarah, I2: 7:00).

Overall then, involvement in business was perceived as something that could “provide a future” (David, I1: 47:00) for Emiratis by enabling them to participate in the UAEs burgeoning commercial sectors and support themselves when they could no longer rely on their government to provide for them. It was also regarded as a manner in which the country could survive following the decline and eventual failure of the petroleum extraction industry and would therefore provide a future for the United Arab Emirates.

## 5.5 Detachment

In discussions about globalisation, the internationalisation of higher education, and the cultural politics of English language teaching, the theme of detachment emerged from the data analyses and resonated with accounts of TESOL practitioner identities regarding political awareness (Crichton, 2010; Neilsen, 2009, Breen, 2006/2007, Varghese et al., 2005). There was a sense that large-scale international change was inevitable, but at the same time was ‘too big’ to affect individuals at a local level. Likewise, the notion that English language teaching would effect significant and long-term

cultural change at the level of local communities was commonly rejected. There was a marked sense of detachment from socio-political change, which was evidenced in positions taken toward sites of global transformation. This was particularly interesting given the situation of English language teachers working in a globalised system of public education and preparing students for careers in the international knowledge economy.

There was also evidence to suggest that feelings of detachment had some connection to a limited sense of 'buy in' among teachers. Levels of commitment to the institution and the local society were very low and this problem was exacerbated by the various conflicts that educators experienced in the research context. The data also suggested that feelings of detachment from institutional management engendered a limited form of resistance to officially sanctioned pedagogies and curricula. Overall, there was evidence of a sense of resignation to the inevitability of both large-scale international change and to the situation at the institution, but connections between the two were not made. The common response to the issues at the local level was to plan on fulfilling the contract of employment and subsequently seek employment elsewhere.

### 5.5.1 Detachment from globalisation

Large-scale changes that affected economies, political systems, and cultures were familiar subjects about which various opinions were expressed by the interviewees. Globalisation, for example, was regarded as inevitable in a world that was internationalising through macrostructural developments involving integration, uniformity and exchange between both states and people. Global change was described as occurring at the levels of society, economy and culture, and conceptualisations of globalisation tended to take a fairly 'distant' macrosocial perspective of the phenomenon. In many cases, globalisation was regarded as a process of 'Westernisation' that

involved the commercialisation of societies and potentially aspects of culture.

The process of globalising was also associated with integration – particularly of markets accompanying the pervasive growth of business internationally. Individual evaluations of globalisation, however, were more nuanced, ranging from globalisation as “one world” (David, I1: 22:50) and a “positive thing” (Ben, I1: 9:48), to “the clash of civilisations and outsourcing” (Sarah, I1: 9:45) and a “horrificing” market driven phenomenon whose manifestation was “KFC and McDonald’s in the Arabian Peninsula” (James, I1: 5:40).

Globalisation then, was conceived as large-scale social change that had far-reaching social and cultural effects. Exactly how this might affect the lived experience of individuals in different areas of life, however, was unclear. The process appeared to be conceived as more theoretical in the sense that it was happening, but its effects were negligible and mostly intangible at the local level. This was despite the participants working in a ‘globalised’ system of higher education within a ‘globalising’ region of the Middle East.

Much like the idea of globalisation, educational internationalisation was described in predominantly theoretical terms as a development that did not affect individuals in the same way as it affected ‘systems’ and ‘processes’ at a more distant level. The internationalisation of higher education was not explained in terms of how it could alter the employment terms and working conditions of teachers, for example. Large-scale ‘forces’ such as Westernisation were regarded as effects of internationalisation, but these were envisioned as targeting ‘local’ populations, not Westerners. While teachers might be ‘part’ of the internationalisation of higher education then, they were not ‘acted upon’ by it, but were ‘acting upon’ others as ‘members’ of it.

The internationalisation of higher education, for example, was described as the establishment of “Western style education” in the Far and Middle East (Jeff, I1: 9:20). Universities in these regions were “set up like [they are in] America and Canada” (Jeff, I1: 9:30) and may even have been “product[s] of Western culture” (John, I1: 14:30) as Western universities “franchise[d] out their institution’s name[s]” to locally-managed institutions in some countries (Mark, I1: 12:30). This ‘Americanisation’ of higher education could also be seen in the local context:

In [the institution] we try to model standards and practises from the United States. I think there are better models to follow, but everybody seems to be benchmarking against everybody else and watching everybody else and learning from everybody else (Ben: I1: 11:10).

As with globalisation, there was a sense that internationalisation was a more ‘distant’ phenomenon and part of a process of ‘Westernisation.’ As such, it did not affect the lives of Western English language teachers, who were already ‘Westernised’ and accustomed to working for employers with a Western outlook. Again, the main theme here was a sense of detachment from large scale sociopolitical and economic change – a feeling that these things existed more as theoretical constructs than as real forces of change that could change the professional lives of teachers.

### 5.5.2 Detachment from the politics of TESOL

English teaching in the UAE was, in much the same way as higher education, described as limited in terms of its capacity to generate real and lasting change in local society. There was a sense that English language teaching could and should be stripped of politics and that this was appropriate to the context; the cultural influences that could accompany English language teaching were best avoided by limiting language teaching to skills development. The role of the teacher then, was perceived as a more

technical and less humanistic performance of the professional duties associated with language teaching:

Here I'd probably define myself more as being strictly just a teacher...perhaps not just myself, but other teachers and other professionals as well, we're kind of seen as being hired to be a teacher and teach English, and not necessarily...share other things that we have, such as values and perceptions (Mark, I2: 3:50).

The function of TESOL practitioners was regarded as entirely “prescribed by the institution” (James, I2: 4:55) and the place of the TESOL practitioner in local society was “first and foremost” as a language teacher (James, I2: 5:00). There was a sense that the professional activities of English language teachers in the local context were neither significant nor influential - either in the context of the UAE or in the broader international knowledge economy. In fact, there was a commonly expressed desire to minimise the impact of professional activity, limiting classroom interactions with students to the technical aspects of language teaching and learning. There was no ‘intercultural’ exchange and this was avoided in order to prevent the ‘contamination’ of local ‘culture’ with the values of Western ‘culture.’

I have a very limited role in education in terms of teaching English, so I'm not trying to teach values or knowledge and I believe that by teaching English people are better able to communicate and that is my sole goal in this environment, in English teaching, and what they [students] then do with that is their business. I certainly try to show a tolerance and reasoning style in what I do, but it's not my job as an English teacher to direct them (Ben, I2: 5:40).

The idea that English language teachers in the local context were “low on the English-teaching totem pole” (Sarah, I2: 17:00) was also frequently communicated. There was recognition of the potential for language

teachers to effect change of some sort, but this potential was so limited that it was practically irrelevant:

I think I'm having the least impact I ever thought that I would in my life here. I think that [development and modernisation] is part of the reason we are here. I like to think that I do that but I think the impact I make is so incredibly small, because my world is very small here (Sarah, I2: 5:10).

The role of the English language teacher in the context of UAE society was most frequently expressed as service provision within the parameters of a contract:

If the definition of UAE society includes me, then still my role within it is very limited. It still is just limited to providing a service to the organisation I work for. It may or may not have an impact on it (David, I2: 5:10).

This was also extended to evaluations of the language teaching profession in terms of its relative overall importance – it's potential to instigate any sort of change on a societal level:

[I see myself] as a foreign labourer I would say - a unit of foreign labour. I know my place...I'm just a teacher. What I can deliver is basically some knowledge, some skills, content-related to the language...develop them somehow, maybe I can develop their [students'] higher forms of mental functioning, and that's all...I'm not thinking of imposing new cultural values... (John, I2: 4:00).

In some cases, this went beyond the local context to society in general and the role of the individual within that:

But again, I'm too small to talk about all of this – I don't even read the newspaper (John, I1: 45:00).

There was also a sense of separation from decisions that were made at the level of management and the limited potential for teachers to influence this process:

I think the (institution) standards are internal and idiosyncratic and I don't see anything international there...but then I don't know anything about the accrediting body so there might be international standards that I'm not aware of. I don't pay a lot of attention to what goes on above my head. It doesn't make a lot of difference...things change in the classroom but I just kind of get on with that, and don't worry about what the managers are doing. I don't think I'm doing anything very useful but it doesn't bother me; I'm not looking for professional satisfaction really (Janet, I2: 5:30).

And again, this was sometimes extended to politics in general, beyond the limits of the institution or the profession of teaching:

As you can tell I'm not very politically motivated or aware..." (Janet, I2: 17:30)

There was a sense that English teaching in the local context would not result in any significant social change. There was also a feeling that English language teachers were not highly valued as professionals, nor were they particularly valuable in terms of the overall importance of their professional activities. It appeared that there was a commonly held desire to separate the occupational aspects of language teaching entirely from cultural (and institutional) politics as well as from elements of the local context in which teachers practised.

### 5.5.3 Lack of commitment

There was evidence to suggest that this sense of separation from the local context fostered a sense of transience on the part of English language teachers, who were employed to teach on a strictly contractual basis with no possibility of more permanent employment arrangements in the future from their current employer. On the subject of commitment to the local context (referring primarily to the students and the institution) there were indications that language teachers regarded their employment arrangements



as strictly temporary, and were reluctant to invest themselves fully in their work as a consequence of this. The numerous conflicts with which they struggled and the resultant frustrations that they experienced also appeared to have limited any sense of commitment that teachers might otherwise have felt towards their employers and their students.

In many instances, the level of commitment to the professional context was confined to the limits of the contractual agreement into which teachers had entered with the UAE government:

With me being a person who is just migratory in many respects, this isn't my country. It's not my country of origin so, therefore, my buy-in to the society is really based upon a contract (David, I2: 5:05).

This lack of commitment was exacerbated by constraints on personal and professional freedom had to be endured by employees at the institution:

I think there are too many other factors working against [autonomy and professional growth] and they're related to the nature of the organisation and what it can't afford at the time (David, I2: 6:30).

In some cases, the institution itself was perceived as responsible for teachers' reluctance to invest themselves more thoroughly in their professional practise:

I wouldn't be here if I didn't [feel committed] to the students and the culture, yes. To the institution, to a degree that if they would let us improve it, yes, but they are blocking us at every turn (Sarah, I2: 8:13).

This was also expressed as a personal choice in some cases – institutional issues notwithstanding:

I'm the least committed of all these people...I never volunteer for anything extra...I'm always dodging those requests. That's me to

some extent, I don't take on extra work, but no I can't buy into the ethos of the [university] – I'm not saying that as a negative thing about the [university] just it's not my nature to do those things anyway, you know wave the flag and be loyal to an institution, I guess I don't feel a part of a family, so to speak" (Janet, I2: 29:30).

There was also a sense that one was not really expected to demonstrate above average commitment to the professional context, as there would be no recognition of such a demonstration on the part of one's colleagues:

Only 10% of what I know is being used here. That's the only source of my desperation. I'm willing to jump into any project but people don't want to invest more time, they don't want to follow up, they don't want to see the fruition of those projects – they don't care (John, I2: 16:00).

This also applied at the institutional level in terms of teachers being recognised for investing themselves in their work beyond the minimum required of them under the terms of their contracts:

I've invested, I've done a lot of work here – in five years I've done a lot – and I've enjoyed the work, but has it taken me anywhere in terms of my career? No. And that's the ultimate roadblock here. I think the opportunities for progression are very limited; you could work as hard as you wanted, you could do as much as you wanted and you know those things are right, but whether you will get anything back for it beyond your salary or the odd occasional 'thank you' is very minimal...(David, I2: 7:10).

There was a feeling that English language teachers were a "transitory population" who, in some cases, had come to the UAE "for a purely monetary reason" (David, I1: 1:03:45). The data indicated that the level of commitment to the local context among teachers was largely determined by financial considerations and did not extend beyond the limits of contractual obligations to the institution:

To be crude about it, I like my job and I need my salary. The first commitment is, of course, I've signed a contract and I'm doing my job professionally (James, I2: 11:20).

This also included a sense of status as a foreign 'expat' and the opportunity to pursue professional development opportunities in the region:

I love it for very selfish reasons; I love the money, I love the opportunity to grow professionally, I like the luxury of Dubai and being able to afford it. I like being high status here, but none of that has to do with the UAE or the company that I work for. I wouldn't have any loyalty to this company or this country (Jeff, I2: 6:00).

The objectives of monetary gain and 'professional development' then, were common and often demarcated the limits of the willingness to invest time and energy in the project of UAE higher education:

I won't use the word mercenary, but my reasons for being here are less to do with the local culture and the institution than they are with personal reasons, such as finances or my own development as a teacher (Mark, I2: 15:35).

The desire to leave the local context in the shorter term was commonly expressed and related to the frustration experienced professionally and the resultant lack of commitment to the institution and the local community:

If we were allowed to do what we know how to do, this would be fun. But we are being told to do things that are absolutely opposite of what we know is right - I cannot live with that for very long. Integrity is important to me. And I think that's just institutional, primarily institutional (Sarah, I2: 9:00).

Although 'coping strategies' were common (see section 5.5.5 below) to help mediate the various demands placed upon teachers at work, there was little apparent desire to continue working for the employer beyond the length of time stipulated in employment contracts:

...you've got to learn to accept it and either learn to operate within it, which means a lot of people do not give their best because the system doesn't allow you to, or you accept it and say after a particular tenure, you move on, and I think in my case that's going to happen...There's fundamentally something underlying which is flawed here (David, I2: 35:05).

There was a sense then, that departure from the institution and the local context was always imminent. There was also an expressed willingness and even a desire to leave the institution and perhaps teaching altogether:

I signed a contract for another year, I guess, but I think I also have ambitions to move on; I don't want to be a teacher all my life. I'd like to move on to somewhere else, I'd like to maybe manage projects - probably educational projects. I think I may be tired of teaching very soon (John, I1: 25:35).

This was related to the pressures associated with classroom teaching in the local context:

In a lot of ways, I feel like I'm past this and I want to continue doing something better, different," in education, [something] administrative or research [related] (I2: 6:50).

Aside from the tension and the resultant lack of commitment attributed to institutional management, there was also the issue of job security for expatriate workers, both at the institution and in the country generally. The constant policy change and perceived instability of the institution was expressed as a feeling that it was better to be prepared to leave at any time:

It seems like it could collapse – it feels like it's built on sand, metaphorically and literally, it feels like it could collapse. There's no sense of foundation – and so many people who live here are on a precarious...you know their residence depends on their job and they can be fired and deported like that and the majority of us, really, live under that – it's not exactly a threat but it's a reality, you know, it can happen. You have no security, and there's no citizenship or anything like that. Not that many people would

want it. One wonders if such a thing as an Emirati will be around in 50 years' time (Janet, I1: 36:00).

One of the themes that emerged from discussions of commitment was the reluctance to invest oneself in 'improving' the situation as it existed locally. There was a sense that individuals did not have the authority to make changes due to managerial constraints. There was also a reluctance to work toward positive change given the temporary nature of employment arrangements and the status of the teacher as a guest worker.

### 5.5.5 Resistance

Another way in which the theme of detachment was expressed was through expressions of resistance to officially prescribed ways of carrying out professional duties at the institution. There was a sense that pedagogy, for example, was officially subject to managerial control and not within the formal power of employees to interpret or modify. This restriction, however, could be circumvented in the relative 'privacy' of the classroom, provided one could "snap back into conformity" if a supervisor appeared "with a clipboard in their hand" (Ben, I1: 42:00). This was framed as a kind of coping strategy, employed to evade limiting organisational policies and thereby derive some satisfaction from professional activities:

Smoke and mirrors...by working around the systems and processes that deny individuality; I do so on a daily basis, but I have to do it incognito. In a covert sort of way, and I suspect this is true across educational establishments worldwide. I find rules and regulations in institutions are things you have to work around to get your job done and increasingly so as there's been a drive towards stronger quality management systems and a one-size-fits-all approach towards education (Ben, I1: 42:30).

There was a feeling that it was necessary to 'pretend' to comply with officially recognised procedures for the sake of maintaining a professional

image in the workplace, even when these procedures contravened one's own sense of professionalism:

I just play along with regulations and guidelines – some of the decisions that I accept, they don't make sense to me but I don't resist. I don't reject what is imposed on me – it's my job, I just know my place (John, I1: 59:00).

At the other extreme, it was possible to disregard the strategies of management entirely, focusing on what seemed to be most appropriate in the professional context:

I ignore a lot of things that I'm now being told to do this semester and just focus on what I know the students need; what's the most important part. I do the same with the book – most of it I throw out (Sarah, I1: 14:45).

It was possible then, to be 'realistic' about what was feasible (in terms of improving students' communicative proficiency levels in English) and tailor the curriculum accordingly:

Before we were aiming at [IELTS band] level 5, but it's my decision to aim at level 4 with these students [a group of 'remedial' learners] to give them a chance – instead of aiming way above their heads and letting them fall by the wayside, I'm trying to pitch it more at their level. I figure if they can get a 4, it's an improvement..." (Janet, I1: 58:30)

In many cases, teacher expressions of autonomy were described as contraventions of official policies and so were framed as 'resistance.' There was freedom to approach aspects of professional practise using unconventional strategies, but this was regarded as 'unofficial,' it was only possible in the classroom and away from 'supervision' by managers. While autonomy was seen as a possibility, it did not seem to be officially recognised by the institution in this context; teachers felt that they could do

what they liked in practise, but would expose themselves to considerable risk in so doing.

## 5.6 Summary

Overall, the interview data revealed a great deal about the professional identities of English language teachers in the research context. One of the more prominent features of local TESOL identity was the conflict experienced when the ideals of being an educator and the realities of the local professional context collided. This was communicated as tension between the divergent demands of students, management and (teacher perceptions of) professionalism in the daily practise of educators. There was evidence that frustration arising from conflict was compounded by a sense of alienation from the local context – also a significant component of local TESOL identities. This in turn appeared to be mutually constitutive with feelings of detachment from the local practise and politics of English language teaching. There was also evidence to suggest that the perceived inevitability of commercialisation was a significant constituent of TESOL identity construction in the local context. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this acceptance likely has considerable implications for local TESOL professionalism and professional identities.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion - Identifying with discourses of neoliberalism**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I provided an account of the experience of TESOL practitioners in the research context that revealed much about their identities as professionals. Evidence from the interviews suggests that their construction of professional identities have particular origins and this chapter will explore these. Below, I will discuss the themes identified in the analysis of the interviews to contextualise them in the larger frames of TESOL, society and globalisation. I will also examine some of the positions taken up by the participants as they interact with the neoliberal ideologies of globalisation and their commercial expressions. Ultimately, my aim in this chapter is to examine the ways in which local institutional practises are infused with the logic of neoliberalism and also function as partial determinants of professional identity construction for TESOL practitioners in the research context.

Specifically, I will begin with a brief overview of the chapter to summarise the arguments that follow it. I will then look at issues relating to commercialism in TESOL as they arise from neoliberal globalisation and are constituent to local language teacher identities. Following this, I will discuss what I regard as consequences of neoliberalisation in TESOL, including political aspects of professional practise, commitment to the profession, marginalisation, and ‘freedom,’ which I also understand as integral to TESOL identity construction.

My aim in conducting this investigation was to explore ways in which the teachers who participated in the study identified themselves as teachers and how they perceived their roles as educators in the context of the United



Arab Emirates. The research questions were:

1. How do English faculty members working at an institution of higher learning in the United Arab Emirates define themselves as teachers?

and

2. How do they perceive their roles in the society of the United Arab Emirates?

The main findings based on the analyses of the research data, were as follows:

(A) In terms of macrostructural discourse and its impact on TESOL identity formation, the interview data showed that

1. The participants expressed subjectivities regarding their self-perceived roles as educators that resonated with the logic of neoliberalism, often through their adopting institutional discourses.

(B) In terms of 'mezzo-level' discourse and practise and their effects on TESOL professional identity construction, the interview data suggested that

2. Institutional practises were infused with the neoliberal discourse of commercialised education.
3. The informants regarded themselves as educators and problematised commercialised management directives associated with institutional life in their professional context.

(C) In terms of individual (non) identification with the local context on the part of TESOL practitioners, the interview data revealed that

4. Institutional subject positions participants had assumed were also evidenced in evaluations of their roles as educators in local society,

preparing Emirati students for participation in the emerging local private sectors.

5. These evaluations were linked to assessments of UAE society, which they judged to be unsuitable for the business world, entrepreneurialism, and modernity in general. They were also connected to estimations of Emiratis as culturally unequipped to direct an independent and self-sustaining society, which the participants had been contracted to help them create.
6. Estimations of UAE culture were also made using the construct of Western culture as contrastive framing. In many ways, perceptions of Western cultural traits resonated strongly with the neoliberal values mentioned above.

(D) Finally, in terms of the consequences of the issues above and their effects on the identities of individual TESOL practitioners, the research data indicated that

7. The perceived inadequacies and incongruities of local education had resulted in the estrangement of the participants from the local context and from the local professional practise of TESOL.
8. The participants felt they were able to exercise professional judgment, but mostly in a subversive way, without the real authority to act as autonomous professionals.
9. The participants underestimated their importance as professionals, the political nature of their work, and the impact of their professional activities on local society, and were potentially complicit in their own marginalisation because of this.
10. The participants in this study did not feel a sense of commitment to their employer, the society in which they worked, or the practise of TESOL in some instances.

Below then, I will explore these findings by theorising them and exploring ways in which they resound with ‘larger’ discourses of contemporary globalisation and commercialisation. More specifically, I will consider the professional identities of the participants as educators and English language teachers, resident expatriates in the United Arab Emirates, and agentic social actors, interrogating ways in which their identities as professionals interact with and are shaped by neoliberalism and its social and political consequences (Table 6 outlines the themes and associated issues that will be discussed in this chapter).

**Table 6**  
*Themes in the discussion*

Theme (identity ‘strand’)	Issues
1. The logic of neoliberalism and the community of consumption	Purposes of education, shift from public to private, commercialised and conflicted roles of teachers, the community of consumption, language teaching and globalisation, flexibility, the entrepreneurial educator
2. The logic of neoliberalism and the cultural “Other”	Western identity and the non-Western ‘Other,’ devaluation of the Other, Western culture and neoliberalism
3. Detachment	Lack of commitment, burnout and exodus, denial of politics in TESOL, the marginalisation of language teachers
4. Agency	“Playing along,” positive aspects of freedom

## 6.1 The overall picture

The analyses of the interview data suggested that the professional identities of the participants were infused with conceptions of education and culture, both of which were, in many ways, underpinned by the logic of neoliberalism. In various instances, the professional experiences of the interviewees were fraught with conflict as some of the commonsense assumptions that inform new philosophies of education (and engender its commercial exponents) confounded their ability to form stable and unified

identities as educators and to connect with their students in what they perceived as meaningful and educative ways.

At the same time, some of the idealised qualities associated with neoliberalism were also recognised as Western cultural traits by the interviewees, who identified themselves by contrasting the ‘culture’ of the students with their own ‘Western’ culture and judging the culture of the students to be deficient. The interview data suggest that the identities of the participants, both as professionals and as members of ‘Western culture,’ were infused with the ideals of neoliberalism and that these – aside from leading them to cast their students as culturally deficient ‘Others’ – also led them to naturalise many of the macrostructural changes that accompanied globalisation even as they rejected the local manifestations of these changes.

The relationship that existed between the interviewees and their employers was more a ‘global’ than a local problem – the various issues such as lack of employment security and professional autonomy that characterise the local/institutional milieu are increasingly common across professional contexts internationally. There was considerable evidence to show that the interviewees were familiar with macrostructural ‘global’ changes that were happening at the level of economies and ‘cultures’ but the interview data also indicate a feeling of separation from these processes – a sense (among the interviewees) that problems encountered locally were local in origin and not the consequences of rapid globalisation.

The teachers who participated in this study – like teachers in other contexts internationally – were sometimes faced with impossible choices between “incommensurate” ways of being knowledgeable participants (James, 2007: 131), particularly in terms of their communication with learners (see above), but also with ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ ideals of education. They sometimes experienced “liminality” (Blum & Ullman, 2012) and “cognitive dissonance” when their personal conceptions of

professional teaching conflicted with their contextual reality (Pearce & Morrison, 2011). This tension was generated by the gap that sometimes exists between “designated” identity and “actual” identity (Liu & Xu, 2011: 594) and may be a consequence of the “simultaneous existence of Fordist and post-Fordist attributes” in educational institutions (Monahan, 2005: 94). The result can be a sense of “conflicted identity and powerlessness” that is connected to the growing prominence of market values during the past three decades, in education and other areas of public life (Crichton, 2010: 1). This is an important constituent in the construction of language teacher identity, and figured prominently in the discourse of the interviewees who participated in this study.

Though the participants were in some ways accepting of the need for and inevitability of large-scale societal changes (including globalisation and the commercialisation of society) in theory, they were less enthused with the manner in which these changes manifested themselves in local practise. They had, for example, accepted the inevitability of privatisation of government institutions, but what they were experiencing in their professional practise was the practical reality of the shift from public to private that characterises institutions of higher learning in various contexts internationally. As ‘public’ educational institutions are managed more like private sector institutions, an atmosphere may be created that “legitimises and exploits a culture of insecurity and fear of unemployment” among teachers, who may not benefit from neoliberal policies (Crichton, 2010: 150). The interviewees who participated in this study described a workplace where this sort of ethos made it difficult for them to derive professional satisfaction from the work that they did.

Working at a globalised institution of higher learning in a context where preparing learners to join the international knowledge economy was a priority, the interviewees regarded their students as potential ‘members’ of

this new global market based system. They agreed, overwhelmingly, that their students were not well suited to the professional and entrepreneurial worlds for which they were ostensibly being prepared. Most of the interviewees ascribed this perceived ineptitude to cultural differences that would likely prevent UAE nationals from being competitive in the emerging regional economy. Their descriptions of the students they taught indicated feelings of estrangement from the local community that could not be resolved due to the cultural chasm that separated them (as Westerners) from their students (as locals). The main issue here – tied into Emirati culture – was responsibility: if students were not able to take responsibility for themselves due to local cultural peculiarities, they would not be successful as students or as working professionals during or following their education/training.

The attitudes of the teachers reflected their identities as professionals, which were, in many ways infused with the common sense of neoliberalism that underpins globalisation and naturalises the exigency of self-reliance, flexibility, and performativity, establishing both insecurity and constraint as unfortunate inevitabilities. Language teacher identity construction is directed by the demands of globalisation; notions of “good teaching,” the “good teacher,” and what constitutes a “good language lesson,” for example, have now been standardised globally (Crichton, 2010: 175). From course content to standards of ‘best practise’ and student achievement, teachers are often expected to work within increasingly homogenised (and in some cases, restrictive) parameters in HEIs with a ‘global’ outlook.

This is not to deny the possibility of “reciprocal influence” between individuals and “macro actors” (economic orders established by neoliberal globalisation), but to acknowledge “macro actors” as the “dominant influence” in the processes outlined above (Crichton, 2010: 160). While the participants in the study - like all social actors – are agentive and reflective

individuals, they are also susceptible to the “public pedagogy” of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2004: 105). Also, while it is politically correct to assert that knowledge is socially constructed collectively and discourse is dialectically reproduced by agentive social actors, the ‘truth’ as it is generally accepted, is more likely to be ideologically charged knowledge promoted by the more “powerful segments of societies” (Troudi, 2011: 2:45-4:58). In the era of neoliberal globalisation, one ‘truth’ is reflected in the narrative that repositions people as self-sufficient, competitive units of human capital who do not expect support from society and may not be motivated to contribute much to it beyond that for which they receive some form of direct compensation.

## 6.2 The community of consumption and the logic of neoliberalism

The common ‘thread’ that connected the different aspects of language teacher identity uncovered during the interviews was the logic of neoliberalism and the “complex assemblage of ideological commitments, discursive representations, and institutional practises” (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004: 276) that it represents. In terms of professional identity, for example, the interviewees described a workplace that had been, in many ways, commercialised and ostensibly reconfigured to service the needs of the international marketplace. Many of the roles they had assumed as teachers were also consonant with the commercial model of education and its utilitarian function as a support mechanism for the global knowledge economy (though they took issue with some of these, as I will explain below).

By examining the various ways in which the participants described themselves first as educators and also as residents of the United Arab Emirates, it is possible to gain an understanding of how the language of neoliberalism had infused their professional identities and affected them as

professionals and as employees. It is possible as well to see how the discourse of neoliberalism operated both ‘on’ them and ‘through’ them (Davies & Bansel, 2007: 247) as they experienced “neoliberal factors” (Liggett, 2011: 188) - through increased “administrative responsibilities” and “heightened emphasis on competition and teaching to the test,” for example (Liggett, 2011: 188) - and “fostered” and “promoted” (and rejected) “capitalist subjectivities” (Blum & Ullman, 2012: 369).

The significance of these discussions was their illustration of the dynamics involved in a commercialising workplace that required teachers to ‘be flexible’ and take up multiple and sometimes contradictory roles as professionals (Monahan, 2005; Crichton, 2010). In fact, this was one of the major themes that emerged from the interview data - the conflict between being an educator and an employee of a large organisation and the perceived unlikelihood of resolving this conflict. The commercialisation of the workplace described in this study is likely interconnected with neoliberal globalisation (Sorlin & Vessuri, 2007; Donn & Al Manthri, 2010; Findlow, 2013) and the discourse of the participants reflected various ways (discussed below) in which this interacted with the experience of being a language teacher.

In many instances, the discourse of the interviewees was infused with the “new language of education,” which requires teachers to “think in business terms” (Pring, 2000: 26) in an international education system that has been “colonised” by the discourse of commercialisation (Monahan, 2005; Crichton, 2010: 184; Fairclough, 2010). The commercialisation of higher education is also mutually constitutive with neoliberalism in the sense that it enables neoliberal globalisation to thrive and advance (through the cultivation and provision of ‘knowledge workers,’ for example) while being itself underpinned and sustained by the logic of neoliberalism (Davies & Bansel, 2007; De Lissovoy, 2008).



TESOL professionalism also reflects the shift towards the commercial and the repositioning of teachers and learners that it involves. Although the interviewees rejected elements of the ‘marketisation’ of education and the practical realities of working in a commercialised educational institution, they sometimes took up discourses of commercialisation themselves – particularly when they described the purposes of education and their roles as educators. This may be an instance of the manner in which local practises are criticised, but the broader contexts of economics, politics and society and their influences upon those practises are overlooked as their legitimacy has been discursively naturalised (Fuller, 2007; Crichton, 2010; Fairclough, 2010; Trent, 2012).

More importantly, it may represent the uncritical acceptance of the social orders (as “macro structures”) that give rise to the marginalisation of TESOL practitioners (as “micro events”) and the failure to recognise the relationship between these occurrences (Fairclough, 2010: 31). Thus the professional identities of the participants as educators, were also ‘commercialised’ in a sense, particularly in light of subject positions they took up regarding the importance of education and their roles as educators within the profession.

### 6.2.1 The purposes of education

The valuations that the interviewees provided regarding the purposes of education, for example, were couched in the discourse of the institution but also that of neoliberalism and its commercial reconstruction of public services, including higher education, which must provide “value for money” by reaching tangible and quantifiable outcomes (Wildavsky, 2010: 36). This ties into the repositioning of education as a “feeder activity to the economy” (Holborow, 2012: 48) within which TESOL is marketed as a “global commodity” (Neilsen, 2009: 85, 86) to be utilised with a view to enhancing

employability (see 3.3.1 above). Thus the interviewees had come to view social institutions (and their practises), including education, in practical terms (presenting education as preparation for entrepreneurship, for example) that accentuated the exigency of commerce and have been to a great extent naturalised in the era of neoliberal globalisation.

The discourse of the participants reflected – in many ways - the rationalities of neoliberalism, which have prompted a shift in public education away from the social and toward the economic (Scott, 1998) as neoliberal ideals have ‘colonised’ public education and “yoked” HEIs to global capital (Monahan, 2005: 182). The purpose of education then, has also shifted toward employability and training within the framework of economic productivity, development, progress and modernity, while issues connected to citizenship, community and democracy have been relegated to subordinates of these (Badran, 1999, Bottery, 1999, Gibbs, 2010, Mazawi, 2010) - though it should be noted here that the ‘true purpose’ of education has not been – nor likely will ever be – established definitively (Collini, 2012).

### **6.2.2 The shift from the public to the private**

All of the interviewees had also come to accept the ‘privatisation’ of public services and institutions as an inevitability, if not an ideal solution to the issue of public funding and resource allocation. This may be an aspect of what Monahan (2005) refers to as a radical “rescript” involving the private appropriation of “public goods” and the “cultural disposition” accompanying neoliberalism that has naturalised this process as “benign” in popular public opinion (182-3) as the “public pedagogy of neoliberalism” naturalises the idea that public services are an “unconscionable luxury” (Giroux, 2004: 105).

Although the participants seemed to have accepted some aspects of the shift toward privatisation and commercialisation in education, however, they were less forgiving of the ‘substantive’ elements of this shift in practise. They identified a number of institutional factors that complicated their professional lives, many of which could be regarded as commercial reforms to local and international education. Several of these involved the interviewees taking on a number of institutional personae beyond their ‘pedagogical selves,’ some of which were in conflict and might have confounded their ability to form stable identities as professional educators.

### 6.2.3 The commercialised and conflicted roles of teachers

The role of teachers as producers and managers of data, for example, was problematised by several of the interviewees as a function that conflicted with their duties as educators. Most of the interviewees commented on the increase in documentation and ‘paperwork’ that they were required to manage as employees, for example. The situation that they described was not unique to their context; globalised ‘economies of education’ often focus on accountability, outcomes, and management, involving centralised power and “surveillance” and placing the onus of succeeding upon individuals (Cuban, 2009: 9). For example, new accountabilities for educators endorse standards of achievement based upon teacher “competencies,” and “bureaucratic surveillance” that will enhance their “performance” (Breen, 2006: 207). The primary function of educators then, has been – in many contexts including the one described in this study - “contorted” into generators and managers of data (Monahan, 2005: 182), who can be monitored and evaluated to ensure compliance with “institutionalised practises” (Crichton, 2010: 62).

Perhaps the most prominent of the ‘identity conflicts’ recognised by the participants were the divergent roles that they had to assume with regard

to their students. Specifically, they were hindered by the conflict between functioning as a teacher/educator and operating as a ‘facilitator’ simultaneously. The repositioning of the teacher as a ‘facilitator of learning’ is sometimes described as an aspect of the “market mode” of education in which teachers are pressured to adopt “learner-centred” teaching methods (Fairclough, 2010: 101) in a “‘customer-centred’ milieu” (Wright, 2005: 50) where students have been reframed as consumers (Porfilio & Yu, 2006) and such methods are “a euphemism for accommodating the customer” (Furedi, 2002: 41).

The participants in the study, while they did not identify the conflict between being an educator and a facilitator, described the difficulty in ‘facilitating’ learning in situations where they felt it more appropriate to assume the role of an authority figure and teacher. Although many of the interviewees framed this conflict in local terms, as a consequence of low student aptitude, teachers in a variety of other international contexts also adopt and attempt to simultaneously engage “role identities” such as the “authority figure” and its binary opposite, the “learner-centred” teacher (facilitator), (Duff & Uchida, 1997: 474, Trent, 2010).

The commercialisation of higher education and its positioning of students as consumers of knowledge can also result in “fabricated friendliness” between teachers and students (Crichton, 2010: 62), where establishing a rapport and motivating learners assumes central importance (Crichton, 2010) and the demands of students may supersede the teacher’s professional standards and values (Wright, 2005). Many of the interviewees indicated that establishing and sustaining a rapport with students was central to their pedagogy as a means of motivating students. While this seemed logical, it could also be problematic in the same way that taking up the role of the facilitator was difficult when it would be more appropriate to act as an authority figure. That is, being a ‘friend’ to the students might conflict

with maintaining order in the classroom and judging the quality of student work (according to institutionally-established criteria) objectively. According to more critical accounts of contemporary higher education, the positioning of the teacher as a facilitator of learning and a service provider – as opposed to an authority on a particular subject - has undermined the image of the professional educator and can contribute to the marginalisation of educators through the deprofessionalisation of education (Fox, 2002).

#### 6.2.4 The community of consumption

The community of practise to which the interviewees belonged bore a strong resemblance, in many ways, to what Crichton (2010) has termed a “community of consumption” (109). When economics supersedes learning and teaching in the context of an educational institution or system, a community of consumption is formed in which teachers, students, and managers are members, but are also in conflict (Crichton, 2010). Teachers practising in this kind of ‘community’ – like the interviewees - are accountable for student learning and struggle to reconcile their understandings of professionalism with commercial aspects of education. Their managers oversee their practise, and students (as consumers) “exert their authority” over both in order to receive the learning that they need (Crichton, 2010: 3).

While Wenger’s (1998) community of practise theory involves sustainability, ownership and “joint enterprise” among members (73), Crichton’s (2010) ‘community of consumption’ sees members as positioned against one another. Students and managers, for example, will evaluate teachers in many contexts – including the one in which the interviewees worked - and in some cases, will ‘compare’ teachers (who will, therefore, be effectively working in competition with one another) to evaluate them. Teachers, in these cases, may become self-interested; downgrading their

own professional standards and doing whatever is necessary to remain employed (Crichton, 2010). They may also become disconnected from one another and lose the capacity to unify and defend themselves because of their fear of unemployment (Crichton, 2010).

While this theorisation risks characterising language teachers as self-seeking and mercenary, elements of it are accurate as they apply to the participants in the study. The self-reported relationship that existed between the interviewees, their managers and their students for example, could be described as antagonistic. The limited sense of ‘buy-in’ that the teachers indicated they felt toward the local context as contract employees (see below) also weakened any inclination they might have felt toward collective action in the interests of improving their local professional situation; almost all of them said that they had come to the UAE to earn money and were planning to leave the institution in the near future due to management-related issues.

Communities of consumption, according to Crichton (2010), also encourage members to commit to the goals of an organisation, while accepting terms of employment and working conditions that are insecure. This may demonstrate a manner in which teachers, though they are critical of their employers in various ways, can internalise the broader goals of the learning institution, which embody the taken-for-granted logic of neoliberal globalisation. The informants in this study had accepted the temporary and insecure nature of their professional context, and to a degree, they had naturalised some of the goals of the institution (or at least the ideological foundations upon which those goals were developed) though they questioned the feasibility of these same objectives as applicable to their professional context.

Finally, the community of consumption suffers from a lack of perspective and often “localises” the issues experienced by members of the

community (Crichton, 2010). Teachers, for example, may see the behaviour and attitudes of their students, as well as the priorities of their managers, as related to the circumstances of the organisation for which they work. They do not tend to connect these issues to “macrostructural themes” (183) or to consider how the organisation may be “shaped within the broader economic, social, and political context” (84). In this way, they become what Crichton (2010) refers to as “absent participants” who have difficulty envisaging the various socio-economic and political changes of which they are a part (84).

This kind of locally oriented outlook was prevalent in the discourse of the participants; they did not tend to contextualise local events (and their own experiences as educators) within the large-scale changes accompanying globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education. Some of them also ‘blamed’ the local context for adopting managerial technologies that are ever more prevalent in educational contexts worldwide, and most of them felt that their activities as English teachers were politically neutral (though many of them indicated that there were potential cultural effects – such as changing mindsets – that accompanied education, though these might themselves be short-lived).

### 6.2.5 Language teaching and globalisation

The ‘localisation’ of issues related to international TESOL (and likely education in general) identified by Crichton (2010) is an important concept to explore in the wider context of global change and its effect on people as members of professional communities and labour forces. As with many people in the world today - who are deeply involved in the process of globalisation but not entirely aware of their level of involvement (Thurow, 2003, Eggins, 2003) - the participants tended to distance themselves symbolically from global change. The language they used to describe

globalisation presented it as something abstract and almost theoretical; it was a process that was happening, but perhaps more to ‘other cultures,’ nations, social groups, or individuals than to the interviewees themselves.

Globalisation, however, affects almost everyone at a ‘local’ level and can have a profound effect on national and individual identities alike; it can “dominate” modern life at personal and collective levels across international contexts (Abed, 2007: 13), transforming areas of public and private life - including commerce, literature, culture, education, employment, “habits of work,” lifestyles and even interpersonal relationships (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004: ix, 12, Hinchcliff, 2000) - and potentially stimulating the formation of a “shared global consciousness” (Ritzer, 2008: 164) in the contemporary era of “globality” (Steger, 2003: 7).

#### **6.2.6 Globalisation, ‘flexibility,’ and the entrepreneurial educator**

One of the more significant ways (for the purposes of this study) in which globalisation can affect people – particularly working people - is through its “moulding of flexible bodies,” who are “accustomed to instability” (Monahan, 2005: 186) and whose sense of equilibrium has been lost (Segesvary, 2000) as they have been compelled to take on identities that are “recurringly adaptable” within an international “culture of change” (Breen, 2006: 201). Thus even within what is considered the Western economic ‘centre,’ many working people are “used to being fired” and have accepted the economic uncertainty - and the need to work “faster and more intensely” (Scott, 1998: 9) - that attends globalisation due partly to the “exporting” of jobs and technology replacing employees (Thurow, 2003: 116).

The development of internationally standardised systems of education at the tertiary level has emerged as a “strategic response” to globalisation (Maringe & Foskett, 2010: 2) as educational institutions have



become both a venue for - and a means of - economic globalisation (Crichton, 2010: 7). This “aggressive process of social transformation” has affected the working configurations of educational institutions internationally (Astis, Wiseman & Baker, 2002: 66) – including the one described in this study - and re-regulated education through regimes of auditing and the “infusion” of business models stressing the importance of productivity and competition (Cuban, 2009: 9, Crichton, 2010).

These global changes have a direct effect on teachers, who need to ‘reconstruct’ their identities to deal with the demands of the changing workplace in the age of reform (Liu & Xu, 2011: 590, Breen, 2006: 218). As in other professional sectors, for example, teachers may be required to take on more “enterprising, self-motivating and self-disciplining” roles (Fairclough, 1996: 75), becoming “economic actors” who will improve student achievement with the right incentive packages (Welmond, 2002: 41).

The interviewees could also be said to have taken on the personae of flexible, adaptable and resilient globalised ‘units of labour’ in various ways – including entering into temporary and potentially insecure employment contracts, relocating geographically in search of employment, and taking on multiple, conflicting and continually changing professional identities - though they struggled with these identities in some cases, as I will explain below. Most of the interviewees indicated that they had come to the UAE to earn money and develop professionally. Their decision to teach in the region then, might also be seen as a means to an end – working to earn money and (as some of the participants indicated) to receive professional development opportunities and certifications. Most of them also indicated that these purposes demarcated the extent of their commitment to local society, toward which they otherwise experienced feelings of estrangement and alienation.

## 6.3 The logic of neoliberalism and the cultural Other

It is fascinating to observe ways in which economic and political aspects of neoliberal globalisation intersect at the local practise of English language teaching and the potential effects of these forces on language teacher identities. It is equally fascinating, however, to consider ways in which these global changes affect teachers' perceptions of societies and cultures that are 'globalising,' such as the United Arab Emirates. The participants in this study, though they had little to draw upon by way of personal knowledge regarding their students and the local communities of which they were members, were able to make some generalisations about their students and the cultural undercurrents that were involved in their interactions with them. They revealed a number of commonly held cultural assessments of their students, many of which they ascribed to their status as Arabs, Muslims, and Emiratis – members of local culture. These included the idea of Emiratis as 'local' people who were specifically traditional, family-oriented, passive, collectivist, and often incapable of independent 'critical' thought or action. They also tended to cast their students as 'undeveloped,' backward and in various other ways deficient – particularly in terms of the manner in which they engaged with the institutional curriculum. These evaluations of local culture constituted what Wenger et al. (2002) refer to as "narrow unjust prejudices" that can be reproduced by communities of practise as a means by which members identify themselves and others (139). They were indicative of conflicts between educators and their students, and more broadly of the alienation teachers felt toward Emirati society and UAE nationals.

### 6.3.1 'Western' identity and the non-Western 'Other'

While there are many theoretical perspectives from which to approach an interpretation of this kind of essentialist cultural stereotyping, the main

understanding that emerged from the assessments of ‘Emirati culture’ provided by the interviewees – and one of the main understandings of this study - is the representation of students (and their ‘culture’) as “binary opposites” to the teachers and the ‘Western culture’ in which they claim membership (Said, 1978, Jandt, 2010: 50). Just as the notion belonging to an imagined ‘Western culture’ can lead to ethnocentrism, it can also promote “negative and capricious evaluations of the new and strange,” positioning popularly held and idealised notions about Western culture as the norm and all others as deficient in various ways (Clayton, 2003: 19).

The participants envisioned aspects of local culture based partly on observations of students in their classrooms (as in Duff & Uchida, 1997) - but were perhaps also influenced by the community of teachers with whom they worked - when they articulated their assessments of UAE society. While it is not possible to ‘prove’ that attitudes toward local culture are transmitted through membership in local communities of practise, this seems feasible given the similar ways in which the informants described their students and the culture of which they were a part (particularly given the fact that all of the participants said that they did not know very much about local culture).

### 6.3.2 Devaluation of the Other

There was evidence that the interviewees had imagined their students - being members of an “Other” social group – as “alien and different” and excluded from their own social group, which they had also imagined as “normal, civilised and superior” (Holliday, 2010: 2). This kind of ‘cultural bias’ may have led the interviewees (and potentially their colleagues) to reproduce and perpetuate a static, essentialised evaluation of students and their communities as an imaginary and mysterious ‘Other’ (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 53) of whom they had little real knowledge beyond what they

assumed.

What is particularly interesting about the evaluations of local culture offered by the interviewees then, is not so much what they reveal about 'Emirati culture,' but rather what they may reveal about socially entrenched notions of 'Western culture' in the discourse of the interviewees. If one accepts that racialised discursive constructions - which reproduce "crudely reductive" valuations of a culturally deficient "Other" - support an idealised self-image of the Self or of the group to which the Self belongs (Holliday et al., 2010: 2), it is easier to understand how the interviewees, as members of 'Western culture' see themselves in a cultural sense.

### 6.3.3 Western culture and neoliberalism

If the interviewees had constructed an image of local culture that is a 'binary opposite' of the Western culture to which they belonged, then it is likely that their assessments of Western culture were considerably more flattering than those of local culture, which could not be described as altogether complimentary. The image of 'Western culture' or 'the West' that emerged from the interviews was one of independent thinking, flexibility, freedom, modernity, integrity, honesty, independence, self-sufficiency, entrepreneurialism, professionalism, resourcefulness, initiative and efficiency – partly from the ways in which the interviewees cast themselves and partly from the ways in which they estimated Western culture contrasted with 'Arabo-Islamic culture' in particular.

What is noteworthy about these valuations of 'Western culture' – inaccurate or not – is that they are very similar to the types of principles and ideals that their employer endorses as objectives toward which students should strive as they 'develop' into global citizens and members of the international knowledge economy. Interestingly, and likely not incidentally, they are also ideals that are associated with the discourse of neoliberalism

and the utopian free market globality that it seeks to create in restructuring the centrally planned local economies of the twentieth century. The neoliberal ideal is one of self-sufficiency, independence, freedom, entrepreneurship, and individualism (Braedley and Luxton, 2010) – almost exactly the opposite of the ways in which the interviewees described their students as members of a ‘deficit culture’ that was not yet ready to enter the ‘global’ era.

The appraisals of ‘locals’ provided by the interviewees, were inverse reflections of Westerners whom many of them described variously as entrepreneurial, independent, hardworking “responsibilised subjects” (Davies & Bansel, 2007: 248) who were “self-regulating” and flexible (Blum and Ullman, 2012: 370). These characterisations of Westerners were also evocative of neoliberal “ideal citizen[s]” (Apple, 2006: 29) as “market driven individual[s]” (Holborow, 2012: 42) and were employed to dichotomise the West and the (Middle) East – positioning members of local culture as the binary opposites of Westerners.

This is a real world example of how “the cultural logic underpinning justifications of racism” can “bear an uncanny resemblance to the economic practises and cultural politics that have emerged under the authority of neoliberalism” (Robbins, 2004: 1). It is illustrative of how the discourse of neoliberalism positions flexible, “self-regulating” (Blum & Ullman, 2012: 370) “entrepreneur[s] of the self” (Rose: 1999: 142) as superior to traditional, family-oriented, socially dependent members of ‘Other’ cultures, and how this can be employed to “inferiorise” (Kubota & Lin, 2006: 478) populations that are arbitrarily classified as parochial and underdeveloped due to their perceived inability to adapt responsibly to the demands of the free market.

In the public sector, neoliberalism “serves as the dominant expression of globalisation” (Monahan, 2005: 2) and this is applicable to higher

education in the GCC region as a neoliberal project of social change (Findlow, 2013, Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). According to Roberts and Mahtani (2010) there is a “seductive, common-sense logic to neoliberalism that reproduces racist ideologies” (250). If race and racism are indeed “inextricably embedded in the neoliberal project,” (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010: 250), this would likely be an issue in an institution with a neoliberal outlook such as public higher education in the UAE and in the GCC region.

## **6.4 Detachment**

There was evidence to suggest that the dynamics explored above had greatly affected the participants – particularly in terms of the degree to which they were willing to ‘invest’ themselves in English language teaching in the research context. Almost all of the interviewees described the various difficulties that they encountered in the course of doing their jobs as both catalysts of professional dissatisfaction and justifications for leaving the institution at which this study was conducted. There was a marked lack of commitment then, among the interviewees - most of whom did not plan to remain working in the research context in the longer term. This was part of the theme of detachment that emerged from the analysis of the research data; interviewees were wary of embracing their work wholeheartedly and appreciating its importance due to catalysts of professional dissatisfaction that beleaguered their teaching practise.

### **6.4.1 Lack of commitment**

Most of the participants described a sense of limited ‘buy in’ to the institution and the project of educating UAE nationals. Again, this was partly related to the nature of the organisation and the various conflicting pressures it applied to educators resulting in a feeling of ‘burnout’ among the participants. There was also the issue of employment contracts and lack

of job security; many of the informants were not motivated to invest more of themselves in their work than was required by their contracts. Large projects, for example, were unlikely to gain much support as those who worked on them would not likely remain at the institution long enough to see them come to fruition or benefit from them. Some of the interviewees also indicated that they did not feel connected to their co-workers due to the transitory nature of the work that they did.

Almost all of the participants had accepted the situation as it was, but planned to ‘move on’ in the shorter term rather than remain and struggle with the varied and conflicting pressures suffusing their professional practise. Some of the interviewees even suggested that they might leave teaching altogether and all indicated that they would relocate to another institution if they were to receive an offer of a higher salary from that institution. The prevailing theme suggested by the data is that of transience, impermanence, and constant change requiring flexibility and adaptability - reclassifying notions of reliability and commitment as frivolous given the nature of the professional context.

The numerous professional issues with which they struggled – from employment terms and job security, to rules and regulations, to curriculum design and desired outcomes for students – alienated the informants who participated in this study, and eroded any sense of commitment or belonging they might otherwise have felt toward their employer and the community of which it was a part. This may relate, in part, to the fact that the language teaching profession tends to be insecure and troubled by a state of “inherent variability” as it follows popular educational methods and results in “swings” between the extremes of competing pedagogical and administrative styles (Kramsch, 1993: 2). As in education generally, these changes are frequent and take on a spontaneous quality, as they are often replaced by competing pedagogies before they can be properly assessed in

terms of their practical efficacy (Birnbaum, 2000). This also has an effect on the identities of teachers in general, and language teachers specifically, who need to be accustomed to frequent change and instability as practitioners, and who may be reluctant to ‘invest’ themselves fully to an organisational culture in which they are welcome only on a temporary basis governed by a contractual obligation (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996, Feather & Rauter, 2004).

All of the teachers who participated in this study were employed under three year contracts with their institution and many of them mentioned that this affected the relationships they had with their employer and their students because they felt limited to the terms and duration of the contracts into which they had entered. In most cases, the participants did not see their responsibilities – or possibilities for professional activity, growth and development - extending beyond these parameters.

The feelings of alienation and limited ‘buy-in’ expressed by the participants may have been compounded by (or indeed, may well have resulted in) the distance that they perceived between themselves and the ‘local’ citizens of the UAE; the interviewees expressed feelings of what might best be described as estrangement from the students that they taught and the communities of which those students were members. This is not entirely unusual, however; in other contexts as well, ‘Western’ English language teachers who work in international settings will sometimes limit their interaction with students to the classroom and have little contact with the local populations of which their students are a part (also see Duff & Uchida, 1997, for example).

#### **6.4.2 ‘Burnout’ and ‘exodus’**

The problem that the interviewees described is an aspect of what Monahan (2005) describes as “fragmented centralisation,” in which decision-making authority in education systems is centralised, but the



accountability for these decisions is shifted to individual teachers (Monahan, 2005: 94). This has the effect of reducing teacher autonomy while increasing workload simultaneously and, although educators are able to demonstrate agency in certain regards, this type of institutional configuration diminishes their capacity to act as “agents of change” (Troudi & Alwan, 2010, 114). The teachers who participated in this study felt vulnerable against an “authoritative and top-down approach to educational management,” which is common in the United Arab Emirates (Troudi & Alwan, 2010: 114-115). All of this has resulted in an “escalating exodus” from the teaching profession because of “burn-out” relating to intensified workloads and related processes of reporting and accounting (Breen, 2006: 207) and this was definitely the case at the institution at which this study was conducted. Almost all of the interviewees expressed their desire to ‘move on’ in the shorter term rather than try to remain at the institution indefinitely.

#### **6.4.3 Denial of politics in TESOL**

Intertwined with the ‘global’ aspects of TESOL as an internationalised and commercialised educational practise are its political undercurrents and political outcomes associated with its local applications. The participants did not feel that they had a ‘political’ role to play in the UAE and none of them felt that their presence in the region, or their professional activities, would have any lasting impact upon local society through their contact with students. Most of them explained their role in the UAE as limited to language teaching with a view to helping their students prepare for careers in the business world (though most of the interviewees expressed scepticism regarding the prospective success of this undertaking). They saw their roles as officially prescribed and predetermined on their behalf and indicated that they did not feel ‘important’ enough either to redefine their roles or to

‘make a real difference’ in local society. Many of the interviewees ascribed the lack of autonomy and power they felt to the local context and accepted it as an unpleasant reality that they needed to temporarily endure in order to remain employed at the institution. Again, these problems were often framed as ‘institutional’ or ‘local’ issues, not as problems with globalised education in general, or with ‘modernising’ societies at large.

It is common, however, for English language teachers to claim that their work is ideologically neutral and “culture-free” in a pedagogical sense (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 211) and the participants in this study generally took this position regarding the political implications of their work as language teachers. In reality, however, the interviewees – and other language teachers in international contexts – are likely more closely connected to the local “cultures” that they serve through their professional activities than they realise, and they likely do have an effect upon local societies through the work that they do, whether or not this is apparent to them (Crichton, 2010). English language teachers work in a profession that is “profoundly and unavoidably political” (Johnston, 2003: 50), and tend to be involved in national, educational, institutional and local “cultures” even when they do not take their roles as educators beyond the classroom (Snowden, 2007: 304-305). As well, the curricula with which teachers and students work is neither ideologically neutral nor culture-free and TESOL practitioners are “so much teachers of culture that culture has often become invisible to them” (Kramsch, 1993a: 48).

#### **6.4.4 The marginalisation of language teachers**

Denying the cultural and political effects of teaching English as a second language can relegate English language teachers to the status of “service providers,” “delivering” English as a product to their clients - without any other connection to the communities that they serve - and

thereby “comply[ing] in their own marginalisation” (Breen, 2006: 218). There was evidence to suggest that the interviewees may have underestimated the impact of their professional activities on their students and the communities of which they were a part. The data also indicate that they underestimated their own importance as professionals, possibly because they had been required to submit to increased managerial control over their work and partially relinquish autonomy and job security (albeit in exchange for money).

Both the ‘localisation’ and the neutralisation of English language teaching were significant in terms of what they revealed about the professional identities of the informants. It is interesting to note that the interviewees did not see themselves as part of large-scale economic and political change; they did not feel that the undertaking in which they were involved was particularly important or significant in the larger scheme of things. This represents a way in which they “complied in their own marginalisation” (Breen, 2006: 218) by denying their importance as educators, professionals, and members of a globalising community.

Marginalisation is a significant issue for language teachers in other contexts as well; reading about the experiences of language teachers internationally, one encounters the “recurrent theme” of “marginality” and “marginalisation” (Johnston, 2003: 134). This is also reflected more generally in commonly held understandings of educators as ‘flexible’ and ‘entrepreneurial,’ “broadly educated, specifically trained” untenured workers (Fischman, 2009: 4, cited in Crichton, 2010). As with the English teachers who were interviewed for this study, teachers in general have experienced the “de-skilling” and “semiprofessionism” (Johnston, 2003: 134) of the teaching profession, which has been “casualised” (Menter, 2010: 55) and staffed by part-time or temporary “adjuncts” and “instructors” (Porfilio & Yu, 2006: 1).

This is not altogether surprising when education systems adopt “rigid and controlling” management systems and curricula that require more flexibility on the part of teachers and students (Monahan, 2005: 186). In the UAE in particular, “contractually hired expatriate” teachers – like the informants in this study – lack the agency of permanently employed teachers and sometimes experience feelings of “powerlessness and even helplessness” as a result (Troudi & Alwan, 2010: 115). This can also be seen in other contexts, however, and is not limited to English language teaching. In the United States for example, which is regarded as the “frontrunner” in the creation of the “corporate-style” university, “employment flexibility” has now largely overwritten permanent employment arrangements for teaching staff who likely do not expect to secure permanent full time employment in the field of higher education (Scott, 1998: 188).

## 6.5 Agency of participants

While the general outlook articulated by the interviewees was fairly bleak in many respects, they did indicate that they were sometimes able to act autonomously and thereby derive some enjoyment from their professional activities. They had a degree of freedom, for example, within the classroom; most of the interviewees felt that they could teach the curriculum in a way in which they felt comfortable, though they were not at liberty to design their own curricula. Many of them felt that teaching methods were a matter of personal choice, though one’s preferred approach might, in some instances, contravene officially sanctioned institutional methodologies (such as ‘student-centred facilitation’). Many of the participants, however, felt that they needed to circumvent officially approved ways of practising in order to exercise their agency as professionals and educators. While they rejected many of the

recommendations made by their employers, however, they felt that they should give the ‘public’ appearance of complying with them, while eschewing them in the relative ‘privacy’ of the classroom.

### **6.5.1 Agency within structure: “Playing along”**

All of the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the management of the institution, particularly in regard to its insistence on their adhering to the particulars of a centrally devised curriculum as opposed to following their own professional judgment. This represents a manner in which the interviewees – like teachers in other contexts - have involuntarily relinquished ownership of their work, and the enjoyment and fulfillment that they derive from it have been downgraded as a consequence (Crotty, 1998). As their professional activities become instrumental forms of subsistence in a capitalistic culture – as opposed to creative, independent and fulfilling careers - teachers may become alienated from their work and all that it involves (Crotty, 1998: 121). The interviewees in this study struggled with various aspects of the curriculum (along with administrative and other issues) - which they felt was inflexible and misdirected in its application to the local context – and did not feel that they had the authority to decide what to teach in their own classrooms.

The interviewees described various coping mechanisms they engaged to mediate the disconnect they sometimes perceived between the curriculum and the classroom – many of which involved surreptitious contraventions of official institutional protocol. In other words, they ‘broke rules’ when they were not under direct supervision, and appeared to follow those same rules when under observation. This type of coping mechanism, however, is not unique to the interviewees or to the context in which this study was undertaken. Educators in general, in fact, may publicly espouse particular pedagogies while eschewing them in favour of “theories-in-action” in the

relative privacy of the classroom (Farrell, 2007: 29). This is an example of the way in which people in various professional contexts (not only education) will “tactically appear to comply” with the discourse of neoliberalism, while rejecting some of its less favorable effects in practise (Fairclough, 1996: 77). Although teachers may, in some cases, be expected to act as “efficient technicians,” presenters, and “fabricators” then, it is still possible for them to respond to these demands in different ways and retain some level of control over their work (Menter, 2010: 36).

This can, however, involve “playing along” with the official discourse of an institution or a community of practise, which endorses a particular way of approaching professional practise (curricula and pedagogy in this case) (Liu & Xu, 2011: 595); publicly supporting the officially prescribed methodologies of the community in order to be regarded as a competent member of that community, but abandoning these same methodologies in practise. In this case, creativity on the part of the teacher may be expressed, but only ‘privately,’ as resistance to, or subversion of, the institution (Menter, 2010: 42). Most of the interviewees described various ways in which they circumvented officially regulated standards of practise as the only ways in which they were realistically able to do their jobs.

As with the interviewees, teachers in general can escape managerial control in an unofficial way, but the demands of the stakeholders behind the institution may put pressure on them and curtail their freedom, alienating them at the same time (Welmond, 2002). Thus while educators are agentive and able to make decisions and act independently in practise, this autonomy is not officially recognised. When the freedom of educators to act independently is not formally acknowledged by the institutions for which they work, they may – though they are able to covertly act independently and creatively – become alienated from and resentful toward those same institutions (McVeigh, 2002, 2006). In the context of this study, the

participants recognised this ‘freedom’ as one advantage of being a teacher, but also acknowledged its limitations as a legitimate and long-term career strategy. They understood that by breaking from officially sanctioned institutional protocols, they were able to derive a greater degree of satisfaction from their work, but were also exposing themselves to a greater degree of risk in so doing.

### 6.6.2 Positive aspects of ‘freedom’

English language teachers – including the informants in this study - enjoy “internationally transferable ‘intellectual capital,’” accepting the transience of modern English teaching positions and the temporary employment arrangements with which they are associated (Breen, 2006: 207). They often value mobility and travel and, in most cases, work in a variety of contexts during their careers (Scollon & Scollon, 2001, Neilsen, 2009).

Many English language teachers also follow a “haphazard pathway toward professionalisation,” updating their qualifications and returning to work several times during their careers (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 212), though they often lack a long-term plan or a sense of commitment to language teaching (Neilsen et al., 2007). English language teachers in international contexts, however, also enjoy the “adventure” of international travel and the freedom to change employers, and have accepted the instability and tension that may accompany this. It would perhaps be erroneous then, to cast the interviewees (or English language teachers generally) as ‘victims,’ though they struggled with the employment terms under which they worked in exchange for their livelihoods.

Contract teachers in general can sometimes be characterised as “rational actors” who are motivated by the need to “maximise their utility” (Welmond, 2002: 47). English teachers in particular will accept well paid –

and in some cases “high status” – positions in international educational institutions, though they are excluded from the host societies and from the power to make decisions in the workplace (Johnston, 2003: 136). Johnston’s (2003) assessment of English language teachers is accurate as it applies to the participants in this study, though most of them did not seem to regard their own status in the UAE as particularly ‘high.’ Most of the interviewees had taken jobs at the institution because of the salary they received, which was high in comparison to that which they had earned at other institutions in the past. Ultimately, however, there was considerable evidence to suggest that the freedom enjoyed by the interviewees and their salaries, were not enough to sustain them – to offset the lack of professional satisfaction and human connection that they would have needed to continue working in the context where this research was done.

## 6.7 Conclusions

The eight English language teachers who participated in this study were part of a government-sponsored agenda to nationalise the private sector industries of the United Arab Emirates while ‘globalising’ the country and interlinking it with the transnational knowledge economy. The public institution of higher education for which they worked was attuned to this imperative and foregrounded it as the rationale for government provision of higher education. The participants in fact, understood that their roles as educators in the local context were superseded by the urgency of ‘modernising’ and ‘developing’ society through preparing students for involvement in Emiratisation.

Their identities as teachers, however, were conflicted and unstable as they struggled to reconcile the various contradictions that they observed as parts of their professional practise. On the one hand, they had identified with institutionally ‘technologised’ subject positions (Holliday, 1999; Trent,



2012), and positioned themselves as ‘modernisers’ and agents of development in the UAE. On the other hand, they identified conflicting social discourses – such as welfarism (through the provision of free education, for example) – and took up “socially antagonistic” (Trent, 2012: 107) stances toward them by associating them with perceived Arabo-Islamic cultural peculiarities.

This is one of the most significant findings of the study because it demonstrates a manner in which neoliberalisation can “actively produce racialised bodies” (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010: 248) through its “technologised” dissemination (Holliday 1999) and subsequent uptake by communities of TESOL practitioners - as sites for the reproduction of “power relations” and associated negative dynamics (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464; Wenger, 1998: 132). It also reveals how TESOL, as a commercialised global industry, can foster “sociocultural inequalities” that are “inscribed” on language teaching selves (Liu & Xu, 2011: 590, Simon-Maeda, 2004), as “inherently racialised” (Motha, 2006: 514) “uninspected...dominant-culture identities” (Hofman-Kip, 2008: 151) and naturalised assumptions of Western superiority (Trent, 2012).

In addition to these assumptions, other aspects of neoliberal discourse had been naturalised among the participants in this study – the inevitability of societal privatisation foremost among these. Like the idea of globalisation, this was not universally regarded as benign, but it was seen as a certainty to which there was no viable alternative. While the participants were accepting of the commercialisation of society, however, they were less enthused with the effects of its associated reforms at the level of local practise; their assessments of institutionally “sponsored professionalism” showed that it conflicted with their own ideas of “independent professionalism” (Leung, 2009: 49, 53). This institutionally technologised “economy of performance,” as part of the market-driven “audit culture,”

conflicted with teachers' "ecologies of practise" (Stronach et al., 2002: 109-110) and the resultant "appropriation of professionalism" (Breen, 2007: 1067) was frustrating to the participants, who felt that their autonomy had been superseded by capricious managerial imperatives.

To better understand how the neoliberal restructuring of educational institutions can insinuate the professional identities of educators – including the participants in this study - it is useful to consider the possibility of an institutionally propagated 'conferred identity,' and the potential effects of this conferment upon the identities of teachers. An individual's identity "stands in a dialectical relationship with society" but this identity can also be "reshaped" through social relations within social structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 173). This 'reshaped identity,' however, may, as well, be regarded as a discrete 'role identity' – separate from one's "subjective" identity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 176) - which is conferred on an individual principally "through forms of institutional socialisation" (Gecas & Mortimer, 1987: 141). To elaborate, the 'self' can actually be conceptualised – in some cases - as a combination of one's "self-constructed identity" (or 'subjective' identity) that is "superimposed" on a "given or conferred identity" (Marica, 1987: 89).

In the research context, this 'self-constructed (professional) identity' might best be characterised as 'the educator,' and the officially conferred identity could be described as 'the facilitator.' Both of these roles had been adopted by the participants, but the conflict between their "subjective identities" and institutionally sanctioned "social identity-assignments" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 176) was apparent as they struggled to meet the standards they associated with being an educator, and also those set for them by their employers. These institutional standards could be regarded as characteristic of the "neoliberal framework" that guides public education and has (partially) replaced "critical pedagogical practices" with "bloodless

instrumental modes of training” (Giroux, 2012: 22, 33) amid the marketised reconfiguration of all “pedagogical encounters” (Giroux, 2004: 103). The result (among the participants) appeared to be a sense of “conflicted identity and powerlessness” as the ‘common-sense’ of neoliberalism clashed with individual expectations of what it meant to be a teacher (Crichton, 2010: 1).

In this case, the participants may have been torn between two “discrepant worlds” and inadvertently become “traitors to themselves” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 170) by attempting to simultaneously adopt the identity conferred to them and retain a ‘subjective’ professional identity (i.e. to be both a ‘facilitator and an ‘educator’ concurrently). This tension can be associated with the ascendance of commercial management models as the new standard of institutional governance in educational organisations worldwide (Crichton, 2010: 2). As a result of this shift, the identities of teachers have not only been “redescribed,” but also “reconstituted” as service providers in an academic industry (Crichton, 2010: 2). The tensions that educators experience working in this type of industry are “both ethically and existentially divisive” as they attempt to negotiate new ways of being in a commercialised workplace (Crichton, 2009: 9).

In order to resolve this dilemma, the participants may have regarded their “institutionalised conduct” as a “role” from which they detached themselves and “acted out” with “manipulative control” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 173). There were more subtle aspects of the conferred neoliberal/institutional identity, however, that had also pervaded the institutional ethos and gradually taken on the appearance of normality to the interviewees as they involved themselves in the daily operations of the organisation (Crichton, 2010). Specifically, these had to do with naturalising the increasingly technical-rational purposes of education, and also with accepting disadvantageous employment terms for educators and the intransigence of management contrasted with the necessary malleability of

faculty (though the interviewees did problematise aspects of this). This is of particular significance because it connects to the idea that as educators begin to identify with and reproduce the discourse of commercialisation, they are complicit in bringing about social change, though they may actually stand to lose from this same social change (Crichton, 2010).

The conferred identity of ‘facilitator’ and trainer/instructor then, was not an easy role for the participants – as trained and qualified educators – to adopt as it engendered seemingly irresolvable tensions within them. Their strategies of coping with these identity conflicts often involved a degree of ‘manipulation’ and ‘roleplaying,’ but also an expressed need to ‘escape’ from the difficulties they associated with working in the research context – largely by completing their contracts of employment and relocating to other professional situations. There were, however, more insidious elements of the institutionally conferred identity, which may have been adopted less critically by the participants and become fused with their ‘subjective’ identities. These identity strands likely transcended the institutional context and could be associated with the general ideological background knowledge of neoliberalism and its reconfiguration of the contemporary social world as subordinate to the demands of the free market.

The participants did not report perceiving connections between the “erosion of autonomy” (Day, 1999: 6) in their workplace and the “ideological prominence of market forces” in society (Leung, 2009: 52). This was reminiscent of their inclination to downplay the significance of their local professional activities as both politically meaningful and instrumental to the process of globalisation (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Both of these attitudes are indicative of the manner in which TESOL practitioners deny connections between their work and broader social, political, and cultural contexts and are thereby unwittingly complicit in their own subordination to free market interests (Breen, 2007: 1068). This may be a consequence of

“neoliberal hegemony” (Scholler & Groh-Samberg, 2006: 171) and its inhibition of a “language of critique” (Gounari, 2006: 78) that would enable both an understanding and articulation of the human consequences associated with neoliberal social reforms in the age of globalisation. It also represents a manner in which TESOL professionals may be marginalised because they are not able to identify the threats that evolving social structures may pose to their own interests (Crichton, 2010).

The teachers who participated in this study had taken up oppositional attitudes toward the “corporate ideological position” of their institution (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 211) as it was embodied in the “audit culture” of the organisation (Stronach et al., 2002: 109-110) and its fixation with “performativity” (Breen, 2006: 208). In doing so, however, they had concomitantly rejected the entire societal context in which they practised, while leaving ‘larger’ neoliberal discourses relatively unexamined. These larger discourses however, had both molded the institutional ethos and affected the participants’ discernments regarding their students’ equipment for the neoliberal knowledge economy. Their rejection of the local context, however, only served to deepen their marginalisation because – as they reported - it made them less likely to ‘invest’ themselves to improve their professional situation and thereby derive greater satisfaction from the work that they did; they indicated that they would sooner leave the institution at which they worked than endeavour to resolve the conflicts with which they struggled as educators.

The participants indicated that they had accepted the “unstable, marginalised, and impermanent” nature of TESOL practise (Neilsen, et al., 2007: 6), with entrepreneurialism, adaptability, and competitiveness as fundamental to their identities as TESOL practitioners (Crichton, 2010). While taking up these subject positions was understandable given the “inherently unstable” nature of their conflict-ridden profession (Thornbury,

2010: 1), their professional lives were consequentially beset with anxiety, frustration, uncertainty, and an expressed sense of resignation toward these perceived inevitabilities that was disheartening. In their rejection of the local context as anything other than a means to income generation and ‘professional development,’ they had tacitly accepted the ‘instrumentalisation’ of social actors and interpersonal relationships that attends the “neoliberal challenge to teacher professionalism” (Gray & Block, 2012: 120).

This is an example of the manner in which neoliberal acculturation can erode social connections and preempt the sense of fulfillment that might arise from such connections (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2008). I do not understand the pathologies outlined above as elements of TESOL’s “virulent, self-serving mercenary culture” (Karmani, 2005: 92) embodied in UAE higher education then; I think that TESOL practise in the research context simply represents the dystopian manifestation of neoliberal “individualisation” (Willis, Smith, & Stenning, 2008: 3) and the subsequent marginalisation of the intangible and immeasurable qualities that enable human connection, enjoyment, and meaning.

### **6.7.1 Contribution of this research to TESOL**

This study was conducted to respond to the need for published research into the professional identities of in-service expatriate English language teachers working in UAE higher education. It presents a view of a community of practising English language teachers working in a globalising environment and makes connections between international developments and local consequences. In particular, it seeks to illustrate ways in which discourses of neoliberal globalisation affect and are taken up by educators – how they respond to neoliberal policy enactments and how their professional identities may reflect these same social structures. I hope that

this research will help language teachers to contextualise the work that they do and understand its full significance – as it has done for me.

In conducting this study, I was interested in understanding the ways in which globalisation shapes my professional identity as a language teacher and my identity as a person. I wanted to examine the manner in which macrostructural change is articulated in institutional TESOL practise and how this might permeate the subjectivities of local practitioners. Further, I hoped to adequately describe the free marketisation of societies and explain how this interacts with education systems to produce institutional management structures such as the one described in the research interviews. Ultimately, I aimed to understand how language teacher identities could be infused with these neoliberal discourses by examining the various ways in which they were taken up by participants in the research study. In doing this, I anticipated comprehending the manner in which teachers may be unwittingly involved in the process of neoliberalisation and thereby illuminating a possible direction for the amelioration of TESOL practitioners' working lives.

### 6.7.2 Implications for TESOL training, practise, and research

By examining connections between ideology and identity construction, I hoped to understand the ways in which TESOL practitioners can inadvertently take up subject positions that are detrimental to them and thereby become complicit in their own subordination to unexamined notions of 'common sense.' My expectation in doing this was connected to the "useful axiom" that "defining a problem is the beginning of a solution" (Foley, 2010: 13), and then developing knowledge relating to that problem is "not just the beginning of a solution, but *the entire solution*" as understanding and transformation can be mutually constitutive (Foley, 2010: 24). Thus TESOL professionals like myself, who "face the onslaught of technologising

discourse,” can benefit from developing a broadened awareness of “the general nature of social and political manipulation in society” in order to resist it (Holliday, 1999: 260).

I think that TESOL as a profession would benefit from programs of teacher education that foster a sense of cultural sensitivity in teachers who are practising in a multitude of diverse contexts internationally. This does not refer to cultural sensitivity in the sense that teachers should learn which pedagogies are most effective with particular “‘target’ ethnic, national, or international cultures” (Holliday, 1999: 259). Instead it involves learning about ways in which the notion of culture itself can be problematised because it can function as a divisive ideology in contexts where it is frequently invoked. Further, I would like to see programs of teacher education and professional development in which the “small cultures” of teachers are examined (Holliday, 1999: 259) to discover ways in which “ecologies” of practising of teachers are insinuated by neoliberal “economies of performance” (Stronach et al., 2002: 121).

I think that developing teacher education programs in this way would help to generate a kind of “meta-knowledge” that would enable the formation of critical perspectives on “subjectivities and identity formation” among teachers (Masny, 1996: 2). Cultivating this type of “meta-awareness” could help to foster a spirit of proactive criticality and subsequent empowerment among TESOL practitioners as educators (Ramanathan, 2002: 65). More specifically, it would permit the “reflexive examination” of officially sanctioned pedagogies (and the assumptions in which they are embedded) requisite to independent professionalism and the ultimate survival of the English language teaching profession (Leung, 2009: 53). This kind of ‘meta-awareness’ could also help teachers to recognise their “pivotal role” in social and political change and the responsibilities that accompany that role in a profession of interethnic and international communication



(Breen, 2007: 1081).

In practise, the expansion of proactive criticality could be achieved through formal training courses, professional development conferences or simply through “discussions with colleagues” to share information and perspectives on theory and practise (Leung, 2009: 55). It is here that research and practise might overlap in the interests of furthering this enhancement to TESOL practise. The participants in this study, for instance, indicated that the research interviews had helped them to gain new perspectives on their professional practise and its wider implications. On her interview feedback memo for example, Sarah commented, “This was the most intellectually stimulating experience I have had since joining this institution. I thank you for the opportunity. It has been a catalyst for me to further my professional development.” James wrote that the interviews had “helped consolidate and confirm what [he] had been thinking for decades,” regarding issues relating to intercultural communication that arose in our discussions. Finally, David wrote, “I think I need to go away and think more about what I am doing here” on his second interview feedback memo. These are examples of how the practise of conducting educational research in TESOL can also generate knowledge while seeking to understand issues related to English language teaching. In this way, both teachers and teacher-researchers could benefit from research inquiry and subsequent expansion of meta-awareness as an element of TESOL practise and professional identity. Further, the knowledge generated in collegial discussions could then be communicated in formal and informal programs of teacher education and development to enable its widespread dissemination among TESOL practitioners.

This kind of education need not be limited to TESOL practitioners, however; it could also be implemented to help managers, curriculum developers, and “evaluators” to “appreciate the need to monitor the

ideological orientation of their *own* small culture in order to be able to accommodate and work appropriately with others” (Holliday, 1999: 259). This could, in turn, lead to the formation of alliances between managers and teachers embodied in “teaching and learning policy teams” where “shared experiences” and teaching practises are reflected upon in the interests of new policy generation relating to teaching and learning (Trent, 2012: 121). The overall effect of collaborative meta-awareness-generated reform would hopefully assist in the achievement and maintenance of “equilibrium” between the “quality of teaching and learning experiences” and the “quest for standards and outcomes” in TESOL through the development of critical pedagogy and practitioner-responsive management (Troudi, 2011: 1). The need for such an intervention in TESOL is urgent, particularly in the United Arab Emirates, where “socio-cultural, linguistic, and historical factors” (Troudi, 2011: 1) necessitate a balanced approach to education based upon new understandings of intercultural communication.

### 6.7.3 Limitations of the study and directions for further research

This study is limited to examining the discursive co-constructions of professional identity among a practising community of English language teachers in the United Arab Emirates. Its focus is on the ways in which the practise of TESOL in the research context is molded by discourses of neoliberalism and how language teachers interact and identify with this. In order to achieve a more complete understanding of the various identities involved in UAE higher education and TESOL then, it would be helpful to consider the perspectives of other social actors in the research context. The identity constructions of “key stakeholders,” such as students and administrators, for example, should be interrogated and contemplated in terms of the ways in which they interact and sometimes conflict with language teacher identities (Trent, 2012: 123). ‘Non-native’ English

speaking TESOL practitioners as well should be interviewed to discover more about their experiences in a profession that is dominated by ‘native’ speakers from English-speaking countries, and how their “non-native status” is inscribed upon their professional identities (Zacharias, 2012: 242).

In particular, the experience of Arabic-speaking local and expatriate teachers in UAE higher education would be a valuable source of data, particularly when contrasted with that of the interviewees in this study, as English speaking Western expatriates. Additionally, other ways in which professional identities can be constructed – ideologically and otherwise – should be examined to give a more complete picture of language teacher identities in their manifold complexity. Further research might consider, for example, the role of ‘life histories’ (Tsui, 2003: 77, Golombek & Johnson, 2011) and “personal experiences” (Welmond, 2002: 42) expressed through narrative (Morgan, 2004) in UAE language teacher identification, which could be considered as they interact and assimilate with the institutional ethos described in this study (and others like it).

Finally, the study should be replicated in other contexts to investigate whether neoliberalism is a significant part of professional identity construction. The United Arab Emirates is currently distinguished by its “lightning paced” globalisation (Ross, 2008: 260) and heavily commercialised system of tertiary education. It would not come as a surprise to me, however, to discover more similarities than differences between the participants in this study and TESOL practitioners in other contexts vis-à-vis the centrality of neoliberalised subjectivities in the construction of their professional identities.

#### **6.7.4 Reflexivity: Acknowledging bias**

In conducting this enquiry and interacting with the participants to obtain the research data, I was an ‘insider’ as both a TESOL practitioner

and a colleague to the interviewees. As an “insider-researcher,” I was studying a group to which I belonged and was, therefore, “intimately engaged” with my research domain (Breen, 2007: 163). For purposes of reflexivity, it is important that I acknowledge, “openly discuss” (Cresswell, 2012: 474) and “continually examine” (Dowling, 2008: 747) the ways in which this personal involvement will likely have had some bearing on the study - and thus potentially affected the level of objectivity that the account can legitimately be claimed to have attained (Cohen et al., 2010).

There are differing perspectives among researchers, however, as to the relative merits and demerits of being connected with one’s research subjects beyond the researcher-informant context. The “Insider Doctrine,” for example, holds that an outsider cannot truly understand the experience of participants in a research setting without sharing in that experience him or herself (Kerstetter, 2012: 100). As an insider-researcher then, I had in-depth “insider knowledge” (Costley et al., 2010: 3), and so enjoyed the advantage of better understanding the informant group’s “culture” within the research domain (Breen, 2007: 163). In addition to having convenient access to the participants as an insider (Costley et al., 2010; Kerstetter, 2012), I also had the ability to “interact naturally” with them because of this familiarity (Breen, 2007: 163). This likely culminated in a greater degree of “relational intimacy” with the group than might have been possible otherwise (Breen, 2007: 163).

Having this advantage as a member of the informants’ professional community, I was in a “prime position” to investigate (and potentially change) a “practice situation” to which I was already accustomed (Costley et al., 2010: 3). Being in this position may also have allowed me to more effectively “engage” participants and thereby derive a “richer” set of data from them (Kerstetter, 2012: 100); as I already knew the participants prior to the interview sessions, it may have been easier for them to ‘open up’ and

share aspects of their experiences with me. To proponents of insider-research, this kind of access and knowledge is vital to the “detailed and thorough” exploration of pertinent issues or problems (Costley et al., 2010: 3), and a fundamental constituent of effective practitioner research studies.

It is also possible, however, that being an insider-researcher made it difficult for me to take a ‘distant’ and objective position toward the participants and the data I collected from them (Kerstetter, 2012). It may not have been possible for me to separate myself from the informants as an insider as our shared experience might have blurred the boundaries between the examiner and the examined; as a researcher, I brought my own biography to the research context (Cohen et al., 2007: 171), and my acquaintance with the participants could have led me to make assumptions based upon my own life experience (as opposed to that of the interviewees) when analysing the research data (Breen, 2007, Kerstetter, 2012).

As well, being an insider might have raised issues related to the ethical treatment of the participants in terms of their privacy and anonymity as research subjects (Breen, 2007). The interviewees, for example, may have been motivated to “behave in particular ways” in reaction to my status as a co-worker (Cohen et al., 2007: 171); they may have been more reluctant to discuss sensitive matters openly with me (as an insider) than they would have with an unknown researcher (as an outsider) (Kerstetter, 2012). This type of self-censorship could have rendered the accounts of the participants less complete and therefore less accurate, though there would have been understandable political motivation for their tendency toward circumscription (assuming this is what transpired during our interviews). It is quite possible then, that my proximity to the research subjects biased the research process, particularly in terms of the quality of the data I collected from them.

Regardless of the position of the researcher as either an insider or an outsider, however, it is very likely impossible to eliminate “researcher effects” from biasing the process of conducting a research study (Cohen et al., 2007: 171). It is important then, that I “hold [myself] up to the light” and recognise the various ways in which I may have inadvertently distorted the findings and their presentation in my final account (Cohen et al., 2007: 171). As a “highly reflexive” researcher, I need to acknowledge here that my many and various subjectivities - including my perceptions, selectivity, background, and “paradigm” - will likely have “shaped” the research (Cohen et al., 2007: 172). This acknowledgment is particularly important in studies that employ qualitative methodologies as this one does (Breen, 2007).

In order to help resolve the issue of researcher bias, Gay et al. (2006) recommend keeping a journal in which the researcher records “reflections and musings” on a regular basis to ensure reflexivity and reveal “underlying assumptions or biases” that might affect the presentation of research findings (405). This can also enable the researcher to monitor attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions toward the research subjects that may surface in the account of the research (Dowling, 2008). While conducting this study, I wrote interview summaries and summary-memos to record my interpretations of the conversations I had had with the participants. These were, in a sense, a kind of journal that tracked the process of collecting and analysing the data. The ‘entries’ had the added advantage, however, of being evaluated by the participants, who indicated that they found them to be an accurate reflection of our discussions.

In addition to monitoring reflexivity through journaling, researchers can apply a kind of “critical reflexivity,” where they acknowledge and examine the social and political issues that have informed the process of gathering research data (Dowling, 2008: 747). In chapter four, for example, I have outlined the political considerations that motivated me to design the

study as I did, and explained why I thought this design was necessary (for political reasons) despite its increased risk of biasing the research process. There were political considerations at the heart of the investigation itself as well; matters of power and subordination in UAE higher education motivated me to undertake an examination of teacher identity as a way to interrogate this compelling social issue.

Ultimately, I agree with the proposition that researchers are always “part of the social world that they are researching” – one that is already interpreted by the informants in the study – and “in the world and of the world” regardless of their status in relation to the research subjects (Wellington, 2000: 42, 43; Cohen et al., 2007: 171). It would be difficult, according to this view, for a researcher to claim any sort of genuine separation or neutrality with regard to his or her research subjects. As an insider-researcher and an educator then, it would be impossible for me not to have some kind of emotional connection to the participants and a sense of identification with the experiences they described as practitioners in the research context. In fact, I believe that this relationship is a major strength of the study; my personal involvement in the social, cultural, and professional contexts described in the report motivated me to engage with and take ownership of the research and work toward its completion. I hope that its dissemination will help, in some small way, to effect the eventual betterment of institutional life for teachers and students in the research context and beyond.

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## **Appendix 1: Final interview schedule for first round of interviews**

### **1. Introductions**

- a) Can you tell me a bit about your background and career experience?
- b) Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- c) Why did you decide to come to the UAE to teach?
- d) How do you see yourself and your role as a teacher?
- e) What kind of teacher are you?
- f) Do you see yourself as an educator?
- g) What do you think is the true purpose of education – what should it be in a perfect world?
- h) Do you think that that is the purpose of education in the UAE?

### **2. Globalisation and higher education**

- a) What comes to mind when you hear the word globalisation?
- b) Do you see this as a positive or a negative thing? Why?
- c) Do you think that globalisation influences education? If yes, how?
- d) Do you think that globalisation and the teaching of English as a foreign or second language are connected? How?
- e) What do you know about the internationalisation of higher education?
- f) Do you think that the teaching and learning of English and the internationalisation of higher education are connected?
- g) Do you think that education and business are becoming more closely related?
- h) If so, do you think that this is a good thing?
- i) Do you find that you are currently required to meet more standards of quality than you have been in the past?
- j) Do you think that meeting international standards for education is realistic in your context?
- k) What is special about the situation in the UAE that makes education here different from other countries?
- l) What do you think about Emirati students receiving free education from their government? Why do you think the UAE government provides free education for UAE nationals?

### **3. Teaching English as a Second Language and suitability of English teaching and learning in this context**

- a) Why do you think that the educational authorities in this country have decided to adopt an English-only policy in higher education?

- b) Do you think it is a good idea for these students to study all of their subjects in English?
- c) Do you think it is fair for your students to have to study all subjects in English?
- d) Do you think that their English language proficiency is adequate for studying in English?
- e) Do you think that the students will benefit from having been educated in English?
- f) How do you think students will use English in the future?
- g) Do you think that learning English could be harmful to students in any way?
- h) Do you think that there is an element of imperialism within mandatory English study in an Arabic-speaking culture?
- i) If so, what part do you play in that?
- j) Do you think that English language medium education will succeed in this context?
- k) How do you think your students feel about learning English? Do you think they enjoy it?
- l) How do you think your students see you?
- m) Do you see any signs of resistance to learning English on the part of your students?
- n) Do you ever resist? Do you ever disregard regulations or guidelines associated with teaching English or with teaching in general at your institution?
- o) How would you describe your working conditions?
- p) To what extent do you think you are able to use your special abilities as a teacher in this context?

## **Appendix 2: Interview schedule first draft for pilot interview 1**

### **1. Introductions**

- a) Can you tell me a bit about your background?
- b) Can you tell me about your career experience?
- c) How do you see yourself as a teacher? What kind of teacher are you?
- d) Do you see yourself as an educator?

### **2. Globalisation and higher education**

- a) What comes to mind when you hear the word globalisation?
- b) Do you see this as a positive or a negative thing? Why?
- c) What do you think is the purpose of education?
- d) What do you think it should be?
- e) What do you think is the purpose of education in the UAE?
- f) Do you think that globalisation influences education? If yes, how?
- g) Do you think that education and business are becoming more closely related?
- h) If so, do you think that this is a good thing?
- i) Do you find that you are currently required to meet more standards of quality than you have been in the past?
- j) Do you think that meeting international standards for education is realistic in this context?
- k) What is special about the situation in the UAE that makes education here different from other countries?

### **3. Teaching English as a Second Language and suitability of English teaching and learning in this context**

- a) Why do you think education is conducted entirely in English here?
- b) How do you think students will use English in the future?
- c) Do you think that the teaching and learning of English and the internationalisation of higher education are connected?
- d) Do you think it's a good idea for these students to study all of their subjects in English?
- e) Do you think it is fair for your students to have to study all subjects in English?
- f) Do you think that their English language proficiency is adequate for studying in English?
- g) Do you think that English language medium education will succeed in this context?
- h) Do you think that the students will benefit from having been educated in English?

- i) Do you think that learning English could be harmful to students in any way?
- j) What kind of difficulties do you experience as a result of the topics that we have discussed?
- k) Do you think that the students enjoy learning in English?
- l) How do you think your students feel about learning English?
- m) Do you see any signs of resistance to learning English on the part of your students?
- n) Do you ever disregard regulations or guidelines associated with teaching English or with teaching in general at your institution?
- o) How would you describe your working conditions?
- p) To what extent do you think you are able to use your special abilities as a teacher in this context?
- q) Why do you think that the educational authorities in this country have decided to adopt an English-only policy in higher education?

## **Appendix 3: Interview schedule second draft for pilot interview 2**

### **1. Introductions**

- a) Can you tell me a bit about your background and career experience?
- b) Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- c) Why did you decide to come to the UAE to teach?
- d) How do you see yourself and your role as a teacher?
- e) What kind of teacher are you?
- f) Do you think of yourself as an educator?

### **2. Globalisation and higher education**

- a) What comes to mind when you hear the word globalisation?
- b) Do you see this as a positive or a negative thing? Why?
- c) What do you think is the true purpose of education – what should it be in a perfect world?
- d) Do you think that that is the purpose of education in the UAE?
- e) Do you think that globalisation influences education? If yes, how?
- f) Do you think that education and business are becoming more closely related?
- g) If so, do you think that this is a good thing?
- h) Do you find that you are currently required to meet more standards of quality than you have been in the past?
- i) Do you think that meeting international standards for education is realistic in this context?
- j) What is special about the situation in the UAE that makes education here different from other countries?
- k) What do you think about the Emiratis receiving free education from their government?

### **3. Teaching English as a Second Language and suitability of English teaching and learning in this context**

- a) Why do you think education is conducted entirely in English here?
- b) How do you think students will use English in the future?
- c) Do you think that globalisation and the teaching of English as a foreign or second language are connected?
- d) Do you think that there is an element of imperialism within that?
- e) If so, what part do you play in that?
- f) Do you think that the teaching and learning of English and the internationalisation of higher education are connected?

- g) Why do you think that the educational authorities in this country have decided to adopt an English-only policy in higher education?
- h) Do you think it's a good idea for these students to study all of their subjects in English?
- i) Do you think it is fair for your students to have to study all subjects in English?
- j) Do you think that their English language proficiency is adequate for studying in English?
- k) Do you think that English language medium education will succeed in this context?
- l) Do you think that the students will benefit from having been educated in English?
- m) Do you think that learning English could be harmful to students in any way?
- n) What kind of difficulties do you experience as a result of the topics that we have discussed?
- o) How do you think your students feel about learning English? Do you think they enjoy it?
- p) How do you think your students see you?
- q) Do you see any signs of resistance to learning English on the part of your students?
- r) Do you ever disregard regulations or guidelines associated with teaching English or with teaching in general at your institution?
- s) How would you describe your working conditions?
- t) To what extent do you think you are able to use your special abilities as a teacher in this context?

#### **Appendix 4: Interview protocol for second sequence of interviews**

1. Can you define imperialism? Do you see imperialism as a threat to you personally?
2. Can you briefly state your role here in the UAE again?
3. Can you expand on your ideas about the purpose of education?
4. Can you tell me more about the curriculum – do you feel that it is suitable? What about the textbook as a curriculum document? How would you change it if you could?
5. How would you describe your own pedagogy? Do you have any ideas about what might form a more suitable pedagogy for students?
6. What do you know about local culture? Do you feel that you are helping to develop local culture? Are you committed to the local culture and/or the institution? Are you learning to speak Arabic? Do you plan to stay here (at the institution/in the UAE) for a long time?
7. What are your thoughts on English as an international language?



## **Appendix 5: Interview summary**

The following is a summary of an interview I conducted with “Sarah” in March 2011.

### **Background – biographical information and career experience**

Sarah is an American who is currently working in UAE higher education as an English teacher, helping to prepare students for entry into bachelor level degree programs that will be taught in English. She has a Master of Arts degree in applied linguistics, which she received in the United States.

Sarah said that she got into education in part to teach “low-level Arab speakers” as her MA research had been done with Arab speakers of English. She worked for a several years as an English teacher in the United States. She has done work in curriculum development and received additional teacher training in Senegal on curriculum assessment. She has worked for three different institutions in the UAE since her initial training and been in the country (with short breaks) for nearly twenty years.

Sarah became a teacher because she thought it would be fun. She also wanted to live in the Middle East because she wanted to go into development and humanitarian assistance. She thought that starting out as an English teacher would be a short-term solution to the problem of getting set up in the region, learning the language, and beginning to develop the skills she would need to work in development.

She started out working at a research centre in the UAE – an opportunity to which she was introduced by a former professor from her undergraduate program. She helped to start a language-training program, as a part of that and this was her introduction to the country.

### **Perceptions of Self / Identity as a teacher**

Sarah likes to see herself as a facilitator, though she isn’t able to do this as much as she would like in her current professional context. She says that the paradigm currently is more of a “learner-trainer” dynamic – more teaching students how to learn and how to behave as opposed to teaching them how to speak English.

She sees herself as a motivator, particularly for low-level students. She is also “extremely patient” and kind – she doesn’t like to demand that her students listen to her from the front of the room. She sees herself as an educator, though she adds that she is an educator “in the most narrowly-defined sense of the word.”

## General views on education and purpose of education in UAE

Sarah thinks that the purpose of education should be helping people learn how to think and to make sense of past events and current events, showing them how what they do today can have an impact on the future and their role in it. She does not think that this is congruent with the purpose of education in the UAE, however. She thinks that society may, in a general sense, want an outcome like this for education, but she also thinks that there is reluctance on the part of UAE leaders to encourage too much independent and/or creative thinking on the part of citizens as it might lead to a shift in the status quo (and a possible erosion of the absolute power enjoyed by the current regime Sarah seems to imply, though she does not say this). Sarah sees UAE education as teaching people how to do things, but not necessarily educating them (8:30).

## Perspectives on globalisation, Education and ELT

Sarah thinks of Huntington's thesis and the clash of civilisations when she thinks of globalisation. She also thinks of outsourcing when she hears the word globalisation. She does, however, think of globalisation as a positive process because she believes that people need to learn about one another before they will be able to live and work together in a truly harmonious way. She thinks that it will help to lessen the impact of ethnocentrism on international relations generally, as the world population becomes more aware of its diverse make-up.

Sarah feels that education is shaped by globalisation – she uses the example of educational authorities in the United States comparing literacy rates and other American benchmarks for learning to international standards and concluding that Americans are falling behind and are not getting the preparation they need for the jobs of today and the future (12:29).

She also feels that education in the area of arts and sciences has suffered in recent years as business has taken a more dominant role in international curricula. She thinks that this ties in to people looking at education as a way to get out of the place where they live and make money. At a national level, she thinks that governments regard education as a means to increasing GDP, and devise curricula that will maximise the potential of the citizenry to do that. She characterises this as short-term thinking.

Sarah says that English education and globalisation are definitely connected. She calls English the language of commerce; it is the first language of commerce and technology (14:30).

## Outlook on internationalisation, English and education as business

Sarah says that she knows nothing about the internationalisation. She says that she is aware that things are happening, but has been too busy to pay much attention to it. She does get the sense that educational institutions are looked at more as corporations these days and she mentions more concern about a “bottom line” in education. She doesn’t think that the standards of business are applied appropriately to an educational framework, however; she uses the example of the business model of “quality” being applied to higher education. She wonders if “quality education” is sacrificed in favour of “business deals” (16:10). She uses the example of for-profit education in the United States, which is very profitable, but does not necessarily graduate “educated” students.

She is suspicious of the international accreditation process in general – she thinks that the “standards” may be devised in an arbitrary manner and may not, therefore, be fair.

Sarah says that education has become “edu-business” and she does not think that this is a positive development as business is about “the bottom line” but since there is no bottom line in education, it is hard to measure the success of education in general. She says that the goal of education is to prepare people to function in society. If graduates are able to get jobs that they like, that satisfy them, this might constitute a healthy “bottom line” in Sarah’s opinion (20:00). Overall, however, she is unsure how a business model and an educational model can legitimately function alongside one another without one (business) corrupting the other (education).

She says that despite talk of “standards of quality” at her institution, the program in which she is teaching is “in a state of flux” and therefore does not rate on a quality scale. She says that she has personal standards of quality to which she tries to adhere, but she feels that she is being held to a list of criteria for determining quality in education and she is unable to identify who devised this list and why it was devised. She says that this is not a true measure of quality and in actuality one does not really have to do a great deal to maintain “standards of quality” as defined by the institution.

Sarah sees herself as being “very far removed” from programs that need to be accredited internationally because she is only preparing students to teach in those programs. However, she feels that only a very few students will be able to meet the standards that the institution has set for entrance into the degree programs (these are, presumably, in line with international requirements for students in English higher education). She thinks that perhaps 25% of her students will be able to achieve the requisite IELTS score needed to enter bachelor-level degree programs at her institution. She thinks that the regulations may be changed, however either

in terms of the actual test, or the test score required for students to enter degree programs.

## **Opinions on the role of students in UAE English education**

Sarah identifies several motivations for students in higher education in the UAE, including getting a (better job), broadening one's horizons, becoming eligible for a larger dowry (21:00), getting out of the house.

She thinks that money is a significant factor in UAE higher education. She describes the K-12 education system in the UAE as "pretty bad," both in terms of Arabic and English instruction. She identifies free education as one way in which the rights of women have been improved, however, which has allowed women to play a greater role in public life. She sees this as an intentional decision on the part of policy-makers to help provide a better life for all Emiratis. She also thinks that the decision was motivated simply by the fact that the UAE is awash with capital from the petroleum industry and so does not need to charge its citizenry to educate themselves.

Sarah says that she "applauds" the Emirati government for their commitment to educating their populace and thinks that they have accomplished a great deal in a short time. She does acknowledge that the concept of development is nebulous and hard to define. She also mentions the debate over the limits to personal freedom and the concept of development – is it possible to develop education without the freedom to speak and express one's views in a public forum (29:20). Asking citizens to think outside the box and become entrepreneurs while at the same time curtailing their freedom of expression sends mixed messages and could eventually create tension. At the moment, however, Sarah feels that the great wealth of the country provides a cushion that protects people from these problems; things "could change."

## **Beliefs regarding the use of English in UAE higher education**

Sarah sees English as the language of textbooks and periodicals and so it is a pragmatic decision for the UAE's ministry of education to require that content subjects be taught in English. She does not entirely agree with this, however; she thinks that students should be able to receive some of their instruction in Arabic. She thinks that the program should be bilingual because it is not entirely fair to require them to study everything in English. Generally, the students she teaches will not have the required levels of proficiency to study in English at a university level.

She does think that students will benefit from having studied in English, but not to the extent that they would have if they had received some of their post-secondary educational instruction in Arabic. She thinks

that students should also be highly skilled in Arabic when they graduate from university.

Sarah says that her students will use English for functional purposes in the future. She gives the examples of “getting something done on the computer” and going to a shop where “they have to speak to somebody in English.” She says that the “vast majority” of her students will not likely ever use English for “anything remotely academic” and that they would not use English unless they had to in the future.

She says that English-only policies are harmful to society and to the individual if there is no opportunity to use Arabic.

## Thoughts on ELT as an element of Imperialism

Sarah describes the word “imperialism” as “loaded.” She says that English education can follow a “culturally imperialistic tone.” She thinks that it is “up to the administrators of the institution” to ensure that this does not happen. She says that this is more likely when opportunity to speak Arabic is taken away from the students. She says that Islamic and cultural studies should be included in the curriculum as well.

Sarah acknowledges that if the practise of ELT in the UAE has elements of imperialism underlying it at its various levels, then teachers may be complicit in this simply by being present and working in the region. She also uses examples of the materials and activities used in the classroom that are drawn primarily from Western sources she is “supporting, whether knowingly or not, an element of cultural imperialism” (38:40). She says that she tries to find ways of balancing this with practical applications for students – she tries to show students ways in which they might actually be able to use English in their local context instead of what their textbooks seem to promote.

She says that she can imagine the reaction of her students when they meet her for the first time – they may never have been taught by anyone from outside the Middle East/North Africa region – and can understand if they feel uncomfortable with a “Caucasian American” in the classroom so she tries to make them feel more comfortable by speaking Arabic (at times) in the classroom. She does however, say that her presence here “makes sense” because she is a native speaker of English.

## Perceived difficulties with English teaching (and teaching in general) in this context

Sarah says that she speaks Arabic and uses it in the class at times to “clarify” concepts and language items. She thinks that while associates and bachelor degrees in English may be a possibility for the region in the near future, graduate degrees may be more difficult. She also thinks that the

number of people actually graduating may be considerably less than the numbers who are entering higher education, however. So the level of success that English medium higher education in the UAE enjoys may be tempered by the ability of its students to master English.

She says that although her students understand that they need to study and learn if they want to pursue further/higher education in the future, but she says that only about 10% of the students she currently teaches are willing and motivated to actually do that. Sarah thinks that her students do not enjoy studying English, partly because of the associations they have with learning it in the past. She also thinks that the curriculum may not be suitable for them in that it needs to build their confidence in speaking English before it becomes more academic (as opposed to starting with the academic curriculum from the first day of classes). She says that students exhibit antisocial behaviors and otherwise resist because (she says jokingly) “we are not providing the right product for the consumer” (44:39).

Sarah estimates that half of her students want nothing to do with English (46:13). She also thinks that many of her students are at the college to “have fun” and to improve their marriage prospects. She would like to see a non-academic program at the institution that was “fun” for students and could “counteract” the negative experiences they associate with learning from high school. She believes that the institution (and all tertiary-level institutions across the country) are “setting [the students] up for failure” by not giving them a choice of the type of program in which they would like to study.

Although Sarah is aware that she may not officially be allowed to speak Arabic in English classes, she says that she will do “whatever it takes” to help her students feel more comfortable in an English classroom situation and to keep them enrolled at the school.

She thinks that her students do not understand why she is here; she is a single, middle-aged woman and she thinks that the “cultural divide” between them makes it difficult for her students to imagine how she could be so far from her home country and on her own at her age. Sarah says that her students get the feeling that she is here for them, not for herself.

## **Overall views on the situation in UAE tertiary-level English education**

Sarah describes her working environment as clean, safe and comfortable. She says that there are no restrictions on technology and resource use. She is happy that the library and photocopying facilities are excellent and unrestricted. She says that in this respect it is fabulous. After the recorder is turned off, however, she speaks briefly about her actual working conditions as far as her practise is concerned and she is considerably less diplomatic.

## **Appendix 6: Summary memo to participant**

Re: Interview, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011

March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Dear Sarah,

Thank you very much again for participating in this research study and giving me your valuable time. The information you provided in our interview was very helpful.

I just wanted to briefly summarise what I feel are the main points you raised during the interview. If you have a few minutes and could look at this for me and comment on what I have written, I would be grateful to you. Please feel free to annotate, correct/edit, add to or delete (parts of) what I have written here, both in between paragraphs (or in the margins) and at the end of the document where I have left space for comments.

Thank you again for all of your help.

1. As a teacher, you see yourself as a facilitator, though you cannot function in this capacity to the extent you would like in this context; you feel that there is more of a “learner-trainer” dynamic in your classroom here. You are also a motivator and an educator. You think that education should involve a measure of independent thinking on the part of students to facilitate synthesis and a degree of criticality (?), though you think that education in the UAE stops short of this in the interests of preserving the status quo. You see education in the UAE more as teaching people how to do things than really educating them.
2. You have mixed feelings regarding globalisation – in one sense, it involves conflict and neoliberalism (trade liberalisation), but in another sense, it is an opportunity for cultures to learn about one another and foster more harmonious international relations. You feel that globalisation influences education and this has led to a focus on business-related concerns (over the arts and sciences, for example) in curriculum design internationally. In terms of the internationalisation of higher education, you have noticed that private sector values (such as the “bottom line” and “quality”) have taken on an increasingly prominent role in education. You feel that applying the business model to educational models will ultimately corrupt education. You sometimes feel that you are being held to a list of criteria for determining quality in higher education, and you are not sure who has devised this list (or why/where it was devised in the first place).

3. You are not optimistic about the number of your students who will actually be able to study at the bachelor level in English. You think that perhaps 25% of your students will gain entrance to degree programs if the current benchmarks remain in place.
4. You think that the UAE government has committed itself to an altruistic undertaking: educating its populace and covering the costs of this as well. However, you are aware that the government is sending mixed messages to UAE citizenry – encouraging Emiratis to “think outside the box” and become entrepreneurs, while at the same time curtailing their freedom of expression. This could create tension among people who will eventually need to find new (and perhaps unorthodox) ways of supporting themselves.
5. You see the decision to make English the language of instruction in UAE higher education as pragmatic. You do feel, however, that education should be bilingual in the UAE because students should have the choice of which language they would like to use (to study) and many of them will not be able to master English (and so will not receive a university education). You believe that the students will benefit to a degree from having studied in English, but perhaps not as much as they would from receiving a well-rounded education. You say that students will use English for functional purposes (shopping, using the internet) in the future, but most of them will not use it for academic purposes and many of them will not use English in the future unless they absolutely have to do so. Overall, you say that your presence here makes sense because you are a native speaker of English and able to provide a good model of effective language use for the students.
6. You think that English education can embody a “culturally imperialistic tone” in some contexts, as opposed to being overtly imperialistic. You believe that this can be moderated at the institutional or managerial levels, however, and it is the responsibility of the administration to prevent it. You feel that the curriculum becomes more imperialistic, however, when the opportunity to use Arabic is denied the students. You do see elements of imperialism underlying aspects of the practise of international ELT, and you think that teachers may be complicit in this simply by being present and working in the region. You mention that the use of materials and activities in the classroom that originate in Western contexts supports cultural imperialism, but you try to balance this with locally sourced



uses for English and other practical applications for language items as well as using Arabic in the classroom (for purposes of clarification).

7. You say that associate and bachelor's degrees will be a likely possibility for Emirati students in the near future, while graduate degrees will be more difficult to attain for the present. You do think that the number of students who graduate with university degrees will be considerably less than those who enter the system, however. Generally, you see your students as resistant to learning English, in part because the curriculum is unsuitable for them. You sometimes feel as if the students are being "set up" to fail. You say that perhaps 10% of your students are truly motivated to learn English and as many as half of them want nothing to do with language study at all.
8. In terms of your teaching practise, you say that you are very happy with your physical working conditions. At the level of pedagogy, you have never been told what you can and cannot do in the classroom. You do mention, however, that you sometimes feel constrained by the curriculum because it is not flexible and does not adequately meet the needs of your students.

If you have any comments you would like to add, you are welcome to do so below:

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## Appendix 7: Annotated summary returned by participant

Re: Interview, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Dear Janet,

Thank you very much again for participating in this research study and giving your valuable time. The information you provided in our interview was very helpful.

I just wanted to briefly summarize what I feel are the main points you raised during the interview. If you have a few minutes and could look at this for me and comment on what I have written, I would be grateful to you. Please feel free to annotate, correct/edit, add to or delete (parts of) what I have written here, both in between paragraphs (or in the margins) and at the end of the document where I have left space for comments.

Thank you again for all of your help.

1. As a teacher, you see yourself as reflective – you are open to changing your teaching philosophy and pedagogy and are not committed to any particular school of thought. You describe yourself as a facilitator or a servant and you see your professional role partly as helping students to get what they want out of life. You feel that teaching serves a need and is a valuable enterprise, but perhaps less so in this particular context.
2. You see globalization as uniformity, which is a negative thing in that it erodes diversity. Conversely, you appreciate being able to connect with people and places to a greater degree than you might have in the past as a result of globalization.
3. Generally, you think of education as a stepping-stone to a better life. Education enables people to get on with their lives and get what they want.
4. You have trouble understanding/identifying the actual purpose of education in the UAE and feel that it may be different than what is stated explicitly by educational authorities in the system.
5. In terms of globalization and the internationalization of higher education in this context, you feel that a western educational system has been imposed upon a local population that is markedly different

from those in the West. You feel that there is local resistance to this imposition and that it is misguided and arrogant. You also feel, however, that some of the regulations of your institution are internal and idiosyncratic. You do not know a great deal about the international accreditation process, but feel that it does not make a significant difference (except in superficial ways) at the level of pedagogy.

6. You feel that the curriculum is a bit too challenging for your students and therefore unsuitable for them. You think that there are not really any negative consequences for students who do not do their work and that this might be a barrier to their success as well. You see your students as wanting more autonomy, and yet not really being self-motivated enough to work independently. Generally, you feel that the students aren't made to take responsibility for things and this is an aspect of a culture that does not have a strong work ethic. You again identify a disconnect between explicitly stated goals of local education (self-sufficiency and participation in the workforce) and reality (handouts and unemployment). This underscores the impression that the real purpose of education here is unclear and may be more symbolic than genuine in some respects.
7. You feel that the choice to use English as the medium of instruction at your institution is appropriate given the international outlook of the school. You do see English as a component of imposed standards from a foreign (Western) context but you do not feel that this constitutes a kind of Western imperialism. You do, however, think that ideologies (of the free market?) can be transmitted to students alongside the English language and that these creep into their discourse in various ways. For example, you say that students discursively construct a false picture of the future (involving starting a business or a career) but may be doing this because it is what their institution wants them to say. You think that students are alienated by this – they may have hopes and aspirations that are distinct from what is officially accepted, but don't feel that they can safely express them.
8. Overall, you feel that English language medium education will be successful in this context because UAE Nationals will ultimately have no choice but to connect with the outside world using some sort of

lingua franca – both in terms of communicating with the domestic labor force and doing business with foreign entities. You are generally happy with your situation as far as physical working conditions go, though you find your workload a bit heavy and the policies/regulations/rules set by the management of your institution sometimes burdensome and impracticable.

If you have any comments you would like to add, you are welcome to do so below:

The curriculum imposes a set of acceptable goals for our students which are completely irrelevant to their lives. I am constantly aware that I am required to encourage the students to be, basically.

## Appendix 8: Analysis grid

### Interview summaries: First interviews conducted in March 2011, arranged by participant

Participant	Role as a teacher and purpose of education	General views on globalization	Globalization, internationalization in higher education and ELT	Views on the connection between business and higher education	Suitability of English-medium instruction in the UAE	ELT / English language curricula in UAE higher education as imperialistic	Prospects for success of ELT/English instruction in this context	Overall views on the institution and the general work environment
<b>Jeff</b>  Interview: Mar 15, 2011 Interview length: 45:24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitator</li> <li>- not lecturer</li> <li>- emphasis is on enjoyment, not on rules</li> <li>- discipline and routine are less important</li> <li>- students learn by doing, not by being told what to do</li> <li>- Jeff is a reference or a resource for students</li> <li>- motivator as well</li> <li>- some explicit, direct instruction is necessary in this particular context</li> <li>- education as preparation for living successfully in society</li> <li>- dialectical: students and teachers exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- globalization as uniformity</li> <li>- includes language, culture, fashion and diet</li> <li>- will "kill" some cultures</li> <li>- can help people to communicate</li> <li>- can foster intercultural understanding on an international level</li> <li>- process is imbalanced in favor of the West, however</li> <li>- process is a West-to-East development and benefits Anglo-American societies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- English is a part of globalization</li> <li>- curricula are "imported" from North American contexts and used in other systems</li> <li>- potential dangers associated with English language learning, accompany globalization and language learning in internationalized education</li> <li>- globalization involves the spread of language</li> <li>- "developing" countries "look to the West" for guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- does not approve of the relationship between business and education</li> <li>- devalues education and certifications</li> <li>- feels that market demands are too strong in current context</li> <li>- prefers to work in an environment where demands of market are less important</li> <li>- Still, sees education as empowering locally as it provides skills to help students gain advantages in the job market</li> <li>- ELT is huge business – bigger than Hollywood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- feels that English is appropriate as language of instruction</li> <li>- however, sees it as a threat to Arabic and Arab culture</li> <li>- Local culture is weakened by incursion of English language</li> <li>- English should be used to teach health sciences and IT</li> <li>- Arabic should be used to teach philosophy, mathematics, civics and theater, or at least English is not needed to teach these things</li> <li>- will ultimately benefit students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I did not ask Jeff about imperialism and ELT directly</li> <li>- this was the first pilot interview and I hadn't included a question about imperialism in the protocol for this discussion</li> <li>- Jeff did not mention imperialism other than the imbalance in West-to-East delivery of globalization and its attendant cultural effects (though he did not use the word "imperialism" to describe this relationship)</li> <li>- I will ask Jeff about imperialism in our second interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- feels that English instruction will be successful if students are aware of importance of learning it and take their studies seriously</li> <li>- thinks that education empowers the local population</li> <li>- will need to use English to survive in the future because of the finite nature of the petroleum industry</li> <li>- will also need English to communicate with the local workforce, who do not really speak Arabic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jeff identifies a gulf between institutional and managerial discourse and the actual practice of teachers working at the institution</li> <li>- this is embodied in rules, regulations, policies and procedures that are promoted by the institutional management and not enforced by the teachers because they are unsuitable or impossible to implement</li> <li>- many of the responsibilities of teachers are onerous and difficult to implement</li> <li>- overall, English language learning is a positive thing – more beneficial than detrimental to students</li> </ul>

## Appendix 9: Topic summary chart

Participant	Excerpt from sample analysis grid/summary chart by theme/topic1. Role as a teacher and purpose of education
David	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-role model and “motivator”</li> <li>- not only an “instructor”</li> <li>- guide</li> <li>- educator</li> <li>- not “pushy”</li> <li>- flexible pedagogy depending on context</li> <li>- education as student development with employment as one outcome</li> <li>- wants to make students aware of opportunities that are available to them: “development” of the individual</li> <li>- “encourager”</li> </ul>
Ben	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitator</li> <li>- role can change however – entertainer, confessor, friend, disciplinarian,</li> <li>- educator, though this is limited to English grammar and vocabulary, no teaching of values or knowledge</li> <li>- purpose of UAE education is partly vocational</li> <li>- also for developing and modernising the country</li> <li>- students may attend for other reasons, however</li> </ul>
Janet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reflective</li> <li>- facilitator</li> <li>- pedagogy and philosophy can change depending on context</li> <li>- servant</li> <li>- helping students get what they want out of life</li> <li>- serving needs though needs are less clear in this context</li> <li>- purpose of education is less clear here</li> <li>- may be a disconnect between the officially stated purpose of education here and the real purpose</li> <li>- generally, education should be a “stepping-stone to a better life”</li> </ul>
Jeff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitator</li> <li>- not lecturer</li> <li>- emphasis is on enjoyment, not on rules</li> <li>- discipline and routine are less important</li> <li>- students learn by doing, not by being told what to do</li> <li>- Jeff is a reference or a resource for students</li> <li>- motivator as well</li> <li>- some explicit, direct instruction is necessary in this particular context</li> <li>- education as preparation for living successfully in society</li> <li>- dialectical: students and teachers exchange</li> </ul>
Sarah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitator</li> <li>- cannot always function in this capacity in current context</li> <li>- “learner-trainer” dynamic here</li> <li>- educator</li> <li>- motivator</li> <li>- education needs independent thinking for criticality and synthesis</li> <li>- this is sometimes impossible here to preserve the status quo</li> <li>- more about teaching how to do something than real education here</li> <li>- all of this is in Sarah’s particular context (foundations)</li> </ul>
John	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitator</li> <li>- no teaching</li> <li>- educator</li> <li>- materials designer (interactive, dynamic materials)</li> <li>- “conduit for ideas”</li> <li>- guide</li> <li>- works best with students who display some level of commitment</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- education as social stratification</li> <li>- imposed on students (UAE)</li> <li>- monitored through IT</li> <li>- “waterfall” of information</li> <li>- students will reject the deluge when it becomes overwhelming to them</li> </ul>
James	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- communicative teacher</li> <li>- helping students to take advantage of world opportunities</li> <li>- good rapport</li> <li>- educator</li> <li>- education should foster independent learning skills in students</li> <li>- inform learners but don't impose worldview on them</li> <li>- UAE education is vocational</li> <li>- UAE education is about vocational training</li> <li>- arts are neglected</li> <li>- unrealistic to enroll all students</li> </ul>
Mark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- educator</li> <li>- pedagogy can change depending on the context</li> <li>- set up an environment that is “conducive to learning” (facilitator)</li> <li>- doesn't like to lecture</li> <li>- feels like he has to be a “manager” at times in this context: large class sizes and student attitudes</li> <li>- education empowers people – taught them to think for themselves</li> <li>- learning skills more important than specific knowledge items for student development</li> </ul>
Participant	<b>2. General views on globalisation</b>
David	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- unifying process</li> <li>- provides international opportunity</li> <li>- benefits those with means – not always poorer people, however, who remain “stuck” and do not enjoy international mobility</li> <li>- globalisation benefits some then, but not everyone</li> <li>- can be unifying, but is not necessarily inclusive and liberating</li> <li>- vision of “one world”</li> </ul>
Ben	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- international integration and the preservation of local culture <b>can</b> benefit people</li> <li>- world gov't and global language are good, but first language should be retained</li> <li>- social and cultural as well as economic process</li> <li>- don't want a hybrid global culture</li> <li>- European union as an example of how this can function</li> <li>- UAE as “global player”</li> </ul>
Janet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- globalisation as uniformity</li> <li>- erodes diversity</li> <li>- lose the “extremes of difference” to spread of uniformity</li> <li>- can connect people and places though</li> <li>- facilitates travel and cultural exchange</li> <li>- creates a smaller world</li> <li>- thinks of an “airport with the same shops and restaurants in every country” as globalisation</li> </ul>
Jeff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- globalisation as uniformity</li> <li>- includes language, culture, fashion and diet</li> <li>- will “kill” some cultures</li> <li>- can help people to communicate</li> <li>- can foster intercultural understanding on an international level</li> <li>- process is imbalanced in favour of the West, however</li> <li>- process is a West-to-East development and benefits Anglo-American societies</li> </ul>
Sarah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- trade liberalisation (negative)</li> <li>- “Clash of civilisations” (also negative)</li> <li>- outsourcing</li> <li>- but, opportunity for cultures to learn from one another</li> <li>- potential for increased harmony</li> <li>- people can better live and work together when they learn about one another and this is a way in which globalisation can function to educate people</li> <li>- can erode ethnocentrism</li> </ul>

## Appendix 10: Topic analysis summary chart

Topic	Points raised by teachers/participants during first round of interviews, January 2011
Role as a teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitator (almost everyone said this – 5/8, 6<sup>th</sup> said he liked to set up an environment that was “conducive to learning” in his classroom)</li> <li>- most interviewees described themselves as educators</li> <li>- interestingly, most of the subjects described themselves as “motivators” – this is at odds with their perception of learner independence as a goal of education</li> <li>- one teacher said that he felt as though he were a “manager” at times</li> <li>- most of the interviewees viewed their practise and pedagogy as something fluid that changed with the context</li> <li>- most did not want to be lecturers – less emphasis on rules, teaching, and/or explicit instruction</li> <li>- the perception of one’s role, then could be said to be murky or blurred</li> <li>- one interviewee described herself as a “servant”</li> <li>- several of the interviewees described themselves as “guides”</li> <li>- al of the interviewees gave several answers to the question of their self-perceived roles as a teacher</li> <li>- On a more “macro” level, however, the teachers were vague about their role in UAE society</li> <li>- this is a direction for further discussion in the second round of interviews</li> <li>- those who mentioned this were fairly ambiguous – one teacher said that she was serving the needs of the local community through her work, though it was not entirely clear to her what those needs were</li> <li>- generally, teachers spoke of helping students to take advantage of opportunities</li> </ul>
Purpose of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- generally, teachers spoke of helping students to take advantage of opportunities (in the world) and empower them</li> <li>- education as teaching students to think independently and critically</li> <li>- saw employment as one outcome of education</li> <li>- Education as preparation for successful living in society</li> <li>- One teacher identified education as a means of stratifying society and assigning roles to people as well as classes</li> <li>- for second round of interviews – would like to explore further the purpose of education beyond the vague “taking advantage of opportunities in the world”</li> <li>- “to produce people who have a knowledge base, but can sustain and develop themselves” (David)</li> </ul>
Perceived purpose of education in the UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interviewees saw tertiary education in the UAE as vocational (this is in line with literature on internationalisation of education and neoliberalism)</li> <li>- developing and modernising the country, “National development”</li> <li>- one interviewee said that the real purpose may be different than what is officially put forth</li> <li>- for example, another interviewee said that it may be for purposes of stratifying society (this corroborates the literature review where UAE higher education has emerged as a means by which the elite can monitor the middle and professional classes)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “learner-trainer” dynamic observed by another teacher – education is more about learning how to do something than about actually doing something</li> <li>- Arts are neglected in favour of business (this is confirmed in Gulf News articles)</li> </ul>
General impressions of globalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social, political, economic, cultural process</li> <li>- integration, unity, uniformity, and exchange seems to be a big part of it</li> <li>- can foster understanding, cultural exchange, communication, travel (for those who can afford it) and education</li> <li>- creates a “smaller world” or “one world”</li> <li>- two of the interviewees used the example of the European Union as a way in which globalisation can function in an economic sense and allow the retention of culture at the same time</li> <li>- however,</li> <li>- does not benefit all people – those who are poor to begin with may not be able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalisation</li> <li>- erosion of diversity mentioned by several of the interviewees</li> <li>- can “kill” cultures through homogenisation</li> <li>- West to East process</li> <li>- outsourcing</li> <li>- trade liberalisation</li> <li>- spreads “templates” of interaction among people – “corporate templates”</li> <li>- involves markets and the franchising of business</li> </ul>
Overall impressions on the professional work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- all of the teachers said that their work environment is excellent in a physical sense – the workplace is clean and well-maintained, and they have access to functioning and up-to-date technology</li> <li>- they were less enthusiastic about the nature of institutional management and the relationship between teachers and managers, however</li> <li>- they indicated to a lack of autonomy due to rigidities in the curriculum and a “one-size-fits-all” approach to education</li> <li>- this approach can result in having to teach material that is wrong for the context in a number of ways such as:</li> <li>- the level is too difficult</li> <li>- there is too much material to cover in too little time</li> <li>- the material is not interesting to many of the students; they need a greater variety of subjects</li> <li>- teachers also indicated that they were not comfortable with policies, procedures and regulations originating at the level of management; they felt that these were onerous and several of the interviewees made reference to the possibility that these had been implemented in response to the institution’s goal of gaining international accreditation (from a Western agency)</li> <li>- they felt that “quality processes” imposed by management had not been fully thought out or understood by managers before being introduced to teachers.</li> <li>- one interviewee referred to this as “meaningless busyness”</li> <li>- some teachers indicated that certain policies were difficult, if not impossible to follow, or just not worth following because they were inappropriate</li> </ul>

## Appendix 11: Interview theme table

Theme	Details
Conflict between managerialism and autonomy	Feeling of being held back by management / rigid managers / little independence / unrealistic expectations
Conflict between students and teachers	Students want grades but not working / teachers under pressure to meet learning outcomes but unable to do so / students resistant to education
Conflict between control and freedom	Connects with critical thinking / conflict between freedom and control / entrepreneurialism and strict managerial control
Student resistance to education	Incompliant / resistant / unteachable / no interest in learning / related to curriculum
Conflicted pedagogies	Facilitators / motivators / managers / fluid pedagogies / blurred roles / servants / guides / disciplinarians / friend
Conflict between accountability and education	Documenting excessively competes with teaching / accreditation / business model / erodes classroom expertise
Conflict between constant change and professionalism	Curriculum / policy shifts / unstable / required to be many different people
Conflict between curriculum and reality	Low English proficiency / struggling students / low aptitude / low motivation
Conflict between social contracts and personal responsibility	Free education seen to conflict with being responsible / no student loans / no competition / no consequences
Conflict between lack of critical thought and demands of the curriculum	Deficient in critical thinking skills / need to be taught these / sociocultural in origin / due to authoritarian nature of UAE
Conflict between ostensible and real purposes of education	Unclear what the purpose is / hard to know real motivations of students / hard to trust the official version
Education for employability	Empowering / successful living / taking advantage of opportunities / independent thinking / all through gainful employment
Privatisation	Inevitable after oil / public sector too costly to sustain / more competition / ties into the purposes of education
Detachment from the politics of TESOL	Just teachers / no cultural values transmitted to students / roles limited to language teaching / very little impact / no politics
Detachment from Globalisation	Globalisation inevitable / happening at the 'macro' level / related to business / no 'micro' level effects mentioned
Avoidance of and exclusion from local society	Not feeling welcome / culture gap / not learning Arabic / no plans to integrate
Separation and estrangement from local culture	Interaction limited to institution / hard to know students / too busy / mysterious
Lack of commitment	Only contract workers / conflict and frustration erode commitment / no recognition for commitment / lack of support / money is primary motivation / no security / plans to leave
Resistance	'Pretend' compliance / ignoring rules / unofficial autonomy in classroom /
Education for modernisation	Developing 'society' / from traditional to modern / responsible / independent / changing mindsets / promoting self sufficiency
Global TESOL	Westernisation and modernisation equated – facilitated partly by TESOL / need English to compete / join global knowledge economy
UAE Culture	Juxtapositions West and Middle East / Work ethic / laziness / Arab and Muslim culture = UAE culture / communication style / family oriented / mysterious

## Appendix 12: Excerpt from list of interview quotes

### Outlook on privatization in the UAE

Involvement in the private sector could “provide a future” for the UAE and this is part of the world and done in English (David I1, 1:00)

Education here is “pushing people forward” (I1, 1:00) if it doesn’t succeed, the post-oil years will be incredibly challenging” (David)

Reduction of vulnerability – when the oil runs out “they want to have a civilization, not just a culture. And by civilization I mean hierarchical organisation of society based on knowledge, ideas, concepts and principles, so they want to instill these new things that come from Western civilization. That’s why they’re investing money and time into education. One day, the oil will run out, at least they will be able to run on knowledge, they’ll be able to produce something – I don’t know what they can produce but at least they will be able to manage and run this country on their own because right now it’s run by foreign specialists” (I1, 33:00) (John)

“Develop a population that will be able and competitive in the future in a global marketplace” (I1, 24:20) (Mark)

“Eventually, when you have a resource-based economy, it’s going to dwindle and collapse at some stage and they have to be prepared for that...things will change. It’s inevitable.” (I1, 25:10) (Mark)

“I think an element of privatization is inevitable, because the state will not be able to continue providing to the degree they are now. And we’ve seen that in Saudi, and here with the pushing of entrepreneurship. And also they cannot provide jobs for everyone - this booming population. In terms of certain elements of the economy that should or should not be privatized, they’re facing the same thing, just at a later stage than we are in other countries” I think that a lot of those parts of the economy will not be privatized unless the economy is so bad.” (I1, 21:00) (Sarah)

“They have to have a fallback position for when the oil runs out, which they say will run out in 25 years. There has to be some fallback position so there has to be business.” (I1, 26:00) (Janet)

“If the Emiratis can’t participate in the private sector when the oil runs out, which at the moment they can’t, what’s going to happen to them? (I1, 27:00) (Janet)

“I should think it’s very likely, I think it becomes clear...I come from the UK, which is a mixed economy...at least it was a mixed economy when I was younger, and almost all of the institutions have been privatised. I think it becomes clear after a while that they become money drains and the government becomes less and less capable of supporting loss-making organisations, they look for solutions and as the population grows here I suspect they will first of all want some of the expertise of privatisation but also the cost savings of supporting a nationalised electricity generating industry or telephone industry or whatever. They’ve already started...it’s not yet open competition but I think they’ll move increasingly that way.” (I1, 23:00) (Ben)

“It’s always accompanied by an acrimonious attitude and relationship because it’s always...cutting, destroying. It’s always cold and harsh. But...I don’t know what else can be done. It seems like a natural thing.” (I1, 43:00) (John)

“Maybe they’re preparing for the time when they run out of oil and they’re trying to use the assets they have now and turn them into something more sustainable” (I1, 45:00). (John)

“I don’t know much about that. All I know is that I know why they’re trying to get people in the private sector and it’s a good idea, but I don’t know if it’s going to be successful. I look at my students and I can’t imagine them running their own business. And I would do the exact same thing that most locals do if I had the chance – I would get into the public sector and be taken care of for the rest of my life and not to work much so, it’s a hard sell...” (I1, 10:10) (Jeff)

### Thoughts on the purpose of education

Purpose of education is to “develop the self” and “broaden opportunities” (I1, 19:35)(David)

“Hopefully education leads to some kind of gainful employment” (I1, 20:50) (David)

“It should be helping people learn how to think and to make sense of past events, current events, and how what they’re doing and what has been done can impact the future and their role in it.” (I1, 7:20) (Sarah)

“One goal is to prepare people to function in the society” “that seems to be the main purpose.” (I1, 20:00) (Sarah)

“So then the bottom line would be, did they (the students) get a job?” (I1, 21:00)(Sarah)

“Enabling people to get on with the life they choose to lead – whatever they need to build the life they desire. A stepping stone, not an end in itself – a means to an end” (I1: 12:00) (Janet)

“To make you aware of what the world is and to know about it and to handle it. In a perfect world, you’d have students that cared, students that listened, that wanted to learn and teachers that wanted to teach, it doesn’t work like that always...sometimes I don’t want to teach and I know my students don’t get much out of my lessons when I’m that way, but it’s all because they...you know, it’s a lot of different things, a lot of different things come into it.” (I1, 7:20) (Jeff)

“Learning to do something, to make yourself better, to make the world better it can contribute and all that. That’s a really broad picture, but...” (Jeff)

“To empower people with an ability to think for themselves, to learn for themselves ...to be competent in different situations...It’s preparation for different professional experiences that you might encounter in life.” (6:30). (Mark)

## Appendix 13: Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH  
THESIS



Graduate School of Education

### Certificate of ethical research approval THESIS

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Your name: Ruari Alexander MacLeod

Your student no: 5800 44173

Return address for this certificate: P.O. Box 1626 Fujairah, United Arab Emirates

Degree/Programme of Study: EdD TESOL

Project Supervisor(s): Tony Wright

Your email address: ram211@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 971.50.317.4337

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: Ruari Alexander MacLeod date: 2/28/2011

**NB** For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must **not be included** in your work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

# Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 5800 44173

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**Title of your project:** Aspects of English language teacher identity in the United Arab Emirates

**Brief description of your research project:** Interviews with English language teachers living and working in the United Arab Emirates. Interpretations of interviews looking at theoretical and substantive aspects of teacher identity and connecting local themes with international issues affecting teachers and other social actors in various professional capacities.

**Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):**

8 adult English language instructors working in tertiary-level education in the United Arab Emirates

**Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:**

- a) **informed consent:** Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents:

All participants will read and sign two copies of the attached consent form, one of which I will retain for my records. The participants will also retain copies of the consent form. They will understand that they are participating in a research study.

- b) **anonymity and confidentiality**

All interviewees will be identified with pseudonyms and their employer(s) will not be identified by name. Details that could identify participants will be omitted from the final report.

**Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

Data will be collected through interviews and memos to participants. I will ask interviewees to answer only questions that they feel comfortable answering – they may skip questions and are not required to answer questions in any particular way. Interviewees can give as much or as little information as they like – there is no minimum or maximum.

**Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):**

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee



I have done everything I can to prevent these types of issues from surfacing – the participants voices will be recorded, but their names will never be mentioned and neither will the name(s) of their employer(s).

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

As the institution(s) for which the participants work will not be involved in the study, the participants will not risk censure by participating in the study (in the unlikely event that their contributions are critical of the practice of English language teaching in the United Arab Emirates in any way). Again, as participation in the study will be on an entirely voluntary basis and participants may withdraw from the study at any time, I do not foresee any potential conflicts arising for participants.

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*This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

*N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor*

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This project has been approved for the period: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011 until: 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): [Signature] date: 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2011

*N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.*

GSE unique approval reference: D/10/11/85

Signed: [Signature] date: 15/09/2011  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

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This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

## Appendix 14: Consent form for participants



### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

#### CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....  
(Signature of participant )

.....  
(Date)

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s):.....

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

.....  
OR

.....

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.